月が導く異世界道中 5

Tsukiga Michibiku Isekai Dochu

あずみ圭

Azumi Kei

アルファポリス

学園都市にグレート・ティーチャー・真G.T.M.爆誕!!

「僕の本業、商人なんですけど(真)」

拝啓、父さん、母さん。生徒になるはずがなぜか先生になってました…

大ヒット!

累計17万部!

薄幸系男子の異世界ファンタジー、待望の第5巻!!

Tsuki ga Michibiku Isekai Douchuu

(月が導く異世界道中)

Volume 05

Fourth Tome

Kuzunoha's Tour

Azumi Kei
(あずみ　圭)

Story Description:

High school student Misumi Makoto is called into a fantasy world by the goddess Tsukuyomi, in order to be a hero. However, the Goddess of this world isn't as thrilled to have him there, and they kick him to the edge of the world just as Tsukuyomi declares that she must leave him to find his own way. Now it's up to him to find his own way!

Original Story can be found here: Link

Chapter 172: Fair-weather girlfriend

A full-scale winter approaches the academy city of Rotsgard.

Several months have passed since the mutant incident that occurred during the annual school festival.

It was a tragedy in which there were a considerable number of casualties as well as significant damage to the city, but it already feels like the city has recovered.

There are still places with empty plots of land, but even those are already being worked on. The city has caught its breath and begun to move forward.

The town's structure is different from that of earth, of Japan.

The biggest cause of that difference is probably magic, though.

Removing rubble, recycling materials, constructing buildings and making roads.

It was proceeding at a rate that makes Earth's modern construction techniques pale in comparison.

Freely using the mages of the academy and seeing their work with my own eyes, it was truly amazing.

It's so fast that I can't even be surprised with the speed at which the city in Asora was built anymore.

In fact, considering that the Eldwas were leading the craftsmen, now I can see that they weren't just being humble when they said they worked slowly because they were being thorough.

「Sorry for keeping you waiting, here's your large-portion lunch.」

「Thanks.」(Makoto)

For a "large portion", it's not very much, huh.

As I try to form an impression of the meal that I ordered, I look out the window.

This is a new store within five minutes' walk from the Kuzunoha company's store.

It was a first for me, but the Kuzunoha company decided to try expanding to the suburbs with a new store.

In the place where we wanted to set up a temporary store, the people from the neighborhood who originally owned shops here closed them and moved somewhere else, so their land became available to purchase.

After I discussed it with Shiki, I bought all of the land.

In the end, the company's location moved only a very small distance, dubiously close to the academy.

The store is wider than before, and by hiring part-time workers, we're proceeding smoothly with the new store's opening.

At midday, on days when the special lecturers of the academy aren't needed, I can come here and eat lunch like this without having to go far.

Just because Ruria isn't here anymore doesn't mean that we've lost our nabe*, so as usual, Shiki goes to Gotetsu often.

TLN*: Hot pot (food dish)

「I guess this is something like a café. It's not really suitable to eat at, even if it's good for having conversations with people.」(Makoto) They don't even give you a lot of food.

Mio definitely wouldn't be satisfied with this place.

She's not the type who likes stores that only have a nice atmosphere.

As expected, a lot of the customers are young people who have just started as students.

There are quite a lot of people like this at our own store, too, huh.

I guess it's because we stock up on rare fruits.

And for the students of Rotsgard academy, where it's not uncommon to be injured while training their practical skills, it's good to always have all kinds of medicine and ointments ready when needed.

There are also quite a few who come to our store with their eyes set on our part-time workers, Jin and Amelia.

「Either way. The store does fine without me there.」(Makoto) I'm a little lonely.

Aqua and Eris have been becoming reliable lately. They've set up a system where there are no problems, even if I'm not there.

Though that's what I was aiming for.

Ever since the school festival, I've been receiving requests from all over the place and have been busy going here and there.

At this rate, I'm going to have my hands full with with the visits to Limia and Gritonia that I'm being urged to go on and my interview with the Demon Lord. Root said something about wanting me to do something if I'm planning to go somewhere far away as well.

「Haah, I wasn't able to buy the Kuzunoha Fruits Set today, either.」(Male 1)「Trying to get those is like a lottery that's drawn before the store even opens. It's just a matter of luck.」(Male 2)「I wish we knew someone who has connections there.」(Male 1)「I heard the normal employees don't even give special treatment, you know? If you got a part-time job there you might be able to secure some for yourself to eat, but they're not recruiting right now. The higher-up person is called Shiki and the store owner is called Raidou, I think? You might have a chance if you know those people.」(Male 2)「I don't have any contacts, and it's not like I want to eat it myself, I've been asked to get it by my girlfriend. If you really want to eat it that bad, you should go line up for it yourself, jeez.」(Male 1)「... Could it be that you've never eaten it before?」(Male 2)「No. It's just fruit, right? I'd rather have one of those weapons they sell.」(Male 1)「Eh, it's amazing, you know? I definitely recommend that you try it at least once.」(Male 2) They're talking about our store.

I look at the two who are discussing the Kuzunoha company, being careful not to be noticed.

Academy students?

They're in plain clothes, so I can't tell.

They're two young people, around my age.

Fruit, huh.

As usual, our quantity-limited cut fruits are being treated as rare items.

When I get back, I'll ask about increasing our stocks on those.

「What, you've eaten it before? There are a lot of people who say that it's not worth the price, you know?」(Male 1) 「Those are either people who've never tried it, or those who have no interest in food at all. It's so good that if I could eat it once a week, I wouldn't need any other sweet food for the rest of the week.」(Male 2) 「To think that you'd say that when you eat the desserts at a café once every two days. Are those yellow ring things cookies or something?」(Male 1) He's talking about pineapples.

It's fun to gouge out their centers, so I've gone to help them with it a few times.

The ones from Asora don't sting the tongue even if you have a lot of them, so they're easy to eat.

「Whether it's medicine, food or weapons, the Kuzunoha company does something different from the rest. Whether it's the level or the quality of the items themselves.」(Male 2) 「I'll agree with you there. And, most of all.」(Male 1) 「「Their employees are nice.」」(Both males)

「Yeah.」(Male 1)

「Yeah.」(Male 2)

When the way we treat our customers is praised, I feel happy, as if I've been praised myself.

When they begged me to let them work for me, I made sure to teach both Jin and Amelia how to treat customers properly.

It seems they're putting that into practice properly.

The forest ogres and dwarves are treating the customers nicely, too.

Though when it comes to people they know or regular customers, I'm

worried about Eris.

「You know her?! Hey, when it comes to Kuzunoha's welcoming girls, there's only that person, right?!」(Male 1) 「Yeah, I was confused at first. But I'd love to make that person my lover.」(Male 2) 「She's reliable and thorough when it comes to her work, so she's got herself together.」(Male 1) 「She's cute, gentle and kind. Other girls should learn a thing or two from her, seriously.」(Male 2) Even so, they're talking about lovers?

Thinking such rude things about our employees.

They're talking about girls, so... Probably Amelia.

That girl, she seems to look only at Shiki, but she's still popular among the customers, huh.

Wait, "reliable and thorough when it comes to her work"?

On top of that, "cute, gentle and kind"?

Is she a girl who would deserve this level of praise?

「She's just like a princess, huh.」(Male 1)

「She's a princess.」(Male 2)

「Aqua-san is the best.」(Male 1)

「Eris-san is the best.」(Male 2)

「Buh!」(Makoto)

Guah, my sour juice went down the wrong way!

It hurts, it really hurts!

What a surprise attack this is!

As I unconsciously spit out my drink, I get some strange, pitiful looks.

I can only keep my head down in shame.

Aqua?

Eris?!

Do these guys have rotten brains or something?!

「Ah?」(Male 1)

「Huh?」(Male 2)

They're not talking to me.

They're questioning each other, because they both said different names.

I want to put in a word of my own, but I need to recover from my unfortunate incident first and regain my composure.

Aqua might be reliable and thorough when it comes to her work, but she's rather businesslike towards the customers.

Eris is small so she might appear cute, but no matter how you look at it, she's definitely not gentle or kind.

Or so I think.

No, the thing is, they're hyumans and they want to make a demi-human their lover?

Either the Kuzunoha company has really founds its place in the city among the students, or young people are more flexible in their way of thinking.

Could it be that they were brainwashed when they were rescued by Aqua and Eris during the mutant rebellion?

「Hey hey, if we're talking about the welcoming girls*, then it's got to be Aqua-san. Eris-san is not bad either, but her charm only exists because of Aqua-san, you know?」(Male 1) TLN*: The term here is "看板娘/kanban-musume". The dictionary definition of this term is "pretty girl who attracts customers to come inside a shop"

「What are you saying, the way that Eris-san accurately judges our moods and what we want makes her the ultimate welcoming girl, right? Use some common sense. It's a little hard for Aqua-san to compare to someone like that, don't you think?」(Male 2) They've started acting like JK's.

JK's that aren't female high-school students.

TLN: “JK” is a slang-term that stands for “女子高生/joshi-kousei”, which means “female high-school student”

Things have clearly heated up compared to when they were discussing our products.

Wow, they’re standing up now.

Surely they’re not planning to have a fistfight over this stupid argument, are they?!

Should I stop them?

No, I get the feeling that things wouldn’t be settled even if I stepped in, so I don’t want to get involved… It would be more adult-like to leave them be. Yes.

「Hey!」(Girl 1)

Oh, someone’s come in to stop them.

What a hero.

I will secretly support you, girls.

「W-what do you want?」(Male 1)

「The best welcoming girl of the Kuzunoha company is definitely Shiki-san, isn’t it?!」(Girl 1) 「Wait, you! Isn’t it Lime-san?!」(Girl 2)

…

I’ll add this store to the list of places I should never visit.

「Huh?! We’re talking about welcoming girls! Who the hell wants to talk about freaking guys?!」(Male 2) 「If you just think about it, there’s no difference between guys and girls! The male employees there are really handsome, gentle and kind! They’re the best!」(Girl 1) I guess I’ll go back.

I stand up, quickly pay and head for the exit.

I can’t say that I have any interest in the outcome of this debate among these people who seem to be our core fans.

In fact, I’m slightly regretting that I even began to listen to this

conversation in the first place.

What are they doing at the window seats?

It seems that even the employee, who has been carefully observing with a smile, has decided that something needs to be done. In the corner of my eye, I see him moving towards the windows.

This kind of fame might be problematic for us.

The bright light of the sunny street is dazzling.

「You there.」(Mystery person)

Hmm, me?

Someone has called out to me, so I stop.

「Excuse me, but I heard that there's a store called the Kuzunoha company near here…」 (Mystery person) Oh, it's a customer looking for our store.

「In that case, if you go along this street –」(Makoto) As I turn towards the person who called out to me to give them directions, I freeze.

「… You, it can't be.」(Mystery person)

That's my line.

What are the chances of this.

「…」(Makoto)

I've been hypothesizing many different ways this could happen, but I never imagined we'd meet like this; words won't even come out.

Either this is the result of the star that I was born under, or I've somehow been drawn to Senpai.

「If I recall, your name was Misumi-kun?」(Mystery person) She knows my name?

Even though our relationship was that of mere acquaintances who only exchanged words a few times.

No, for Otonashi-senpai, it's possible.

She's a person with no visible flaws, inside or outside.

To the point you'd wonder, "humans like this exist?"

Really, why is Senpai in this world?

「... Otonashi-senpai.」(Makoto)

The hero's party left Limia heading for the Lorel Union with a strict transfer schedule to follow. They didn't have any plans to come to academy city.

But now, the hero of Limia is right in front of my eyes, asking for the location of the Kuzunoha company.

Otonashi Hibiki-senpai.

I get the impression that she's a little sharper than she was when I met her while she was the student council president.

Seeing Senpai here, whispering her name is the only reaction I'm capable of.

Chapter 173: From the same town

Honestly, Senpai is famous and her movements are easy to predict, so I had never imagined a case where I would meet her simply by chance.

It's somewhat fortunate that Shiki, who's acquainted with her, isn't with me right now. Maybe I should be happy with that... But I'm not.

If I'm not mistaken, Shiki will be at Asora for the whole day today.

Which means there's no chance that he'll meet Senpai.

Let's see, the people that Senpai and I are commonly acquainted with would be Limia's king and Prince Joshua.

So it's safer to assume that those two have talked to Senpai about me while referring to me as Raidou.

But Senpai is aware that I'm Misumi Makoto, so she shouldn't know that I'm Raidou.

So should I introduce myself as Raidou now or would it be better to conceal that I'm Raidou?

If I introduce myself as Raidou, she'll know that Raidou is the leader of the Kuzunoha company. Senpai definitely came here knowing that the Kuzunoha company is here, right?

Which means that even if I hide it now, I get the feeling that fact will be revealed sooner or later.

Wait. Is it a problem if Senpai knows that I'm Raidou?

When I went to Limia, I didn't call myself Raidou, I think.

So if I don't introduce myself as Raidou here, I guess the chances of it being revealed in the near future are pretty high?

In that case, it's better to tell the truth?

I could just explain that I'm using this false name because there's someone (a goddess) that I don't want my movements to be noticed by.

And I get the feeling that even if I try to lie here, Senpai will pick up on

my suspicious behavior anyway.

…

Okay, let's introduce myself as Raidou.

That's easier, and better for the future as well.

The inside of my head is quite chaotic as I think about various things, but I somehow manage to come to a decision.

「Misumi-kun?」(Hibiki)

Senpai calls out to me, since I've frozen in place.

「Ah, Senpai, actually…」(Makoto)

As Senpai gives me a puzzled look, I explain that I'm going by the name of Raidou now.

For some reason, Senpai looks extremely shocked upon learning that I'm Raidou.

The king and the prince.

Just what have you been telling Senpai about me!

「Ah, you're Raidou? That's the same name as the head of the Kuzunoha company, isn't it?」(Hibiki) 「Y-yes. I'm acting as the leader for the Kuzunoha company. Though I'm being helped a lot by the people around me.」(Makoto) 「Misumi-kun is… Raidou… Wait a moment, that's important too, but isn't there a more important detail?!」(Hibiki) 「Eh?」(Makoto)

「Are you a hero, too? I heard from the goddess that there are two heroes in this world. The fact that you're here means that you're a third one, right?」(Hibiki) 「Ah… No, my circumstances are a little different from you Senpais. What the goddess told you is correct. There are two heroes, because I'm not a hero.」(Makoto) 「But you were summoned here, right? By her.」(Hibiki)

「Well, yes. Ah, I'm sorry. First, I'll lead the way to our Kuzunoha company.」(Makoto) It seems Senpai had some business with our

company from the beginning.

It's better to go there rather than stand around outside and talk like this.

「To the Kuzunoha company? Hmm… I guess so. Well then, I'll impose on you for a little while.」(Hibiki) 「Yes, please feel free. "For a little while", does that mean that you have other important matters to attend to, Senpai?」(Makoto) She was supposed to be heading to Lorel, so I doubt she's particularly free.

Anyhow, I'll try asking her about that.

It looks like our conversation will consist entirely of asking each other questions, but I'm kind of looking forward to it.

She was supposed to have some companions with her, but right now she's alone.

It's strange that she's carrying her sword that's supposed to be her weapon on her back, wrapped in cloth.

Since it's unusual to see people walking around armed in this academy city.

Senpai is a hero, so I'd assume that she's staying at a high-class inn where she wouldn't have to worry about her weapon being stolen. If she left it with them, it'd be easier to walk around.

It'd be safer to carry it if she were planning to go to the more dangerous areas of the city, but then I don't understand why she wouldn't have her companions with her.

For now, as I'm deep in thought about various things, I erase the memory of Senpai's extreme clothing as well as my state upon seeing that from my head.

Because of that, I don't say much during the short time that I'm leading Senpai along.

As if she's thinking about something herself, she simply follows my lead silently.

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「And then, I was told that the Kuzunoha company has skilled dwarves.」(Hibiki)「So your business with us is that you need your sword repaired. But Senpai, even with our craftsmen, I think it's impossible for it to be finished today.」(Makoto) As I listen to Senpai in the company's drawing room, she explains why she came to academy city in such a hurry.

We also touched on the battle that happened in the royal capital city of Limia, but she hasn't made the connection between the names Shiki or Larva and us. That makes me truly relieved.

The reason she's stopped by in Rotsgard, which isn't directly on the way to Lorel from Limia, is the craftsmen of the Kuzunoha company.

The people of Limia know quite a lot about us, huh.

Either that, or they sent Otonashi-senpai here to make a request for us to work together with the Kingdom of Limia.

Even when she was in Japan, she was the kind of person who could lead others.

Of course, that's still the case now.

She's still the same senpai I admired from afar in Japan.

「I didn't expect that my weapon could be repaired in a day. I'm going to be staying here for another week, so as long as it's finished by then, there won't be any problems. It'd be easy if Beren-san were here, is he currently present?」(Hibiki) Beren?

Why is Beren's name being mentioned here?

「Beren, you say? He's working in our first store in Tsige. Are you acquainted with him?」(Makoto)「That sword, I had it made for me by Beren-san. Though it looks a bit different to when I first got it from him.」(Hibiki) Beren made a weapon for Senpai?

A strange relationship has been built without me knowing.

She said she was in Tsige for about a month, so did it happen then?

I'm grateful that she chose us out of all the stores that are available, but if Senpai and her party have been polishing their skills in the wastelands, it's amazing that we haven't met sooner.

I'm not sure if that's lucky or unlucky.

Anyway, she wasn't given some pre-made product; it's a weapon that was created for her to use.

To think that their relationship is such that she remembers his name properly.

I ignored it back then, so I'll confirm it properly now.

「Please wait a moment. The craftsman who works here will come soon.」(Makoto) If it's a weapon that Beren made, there'll be no problem with leaving it here.

I can just show it to him in Asora tonight or something.

If he has a whole week, I'm sure Beren can repair a weapon that he made himself.

「Did you call, Waka-sama?」

「Fufu~」(Hibiki)

Senpai is laughing, as if she finds something funny.

When I was greeted by a loud「Welcome back, Waka-sama!」as we returned she was dumbfounded, but it seems she finds it amusing now.

She's reacting like this every time she hears someone call me "Waka-sama".

I take the sword that's wrapped in cloth from Senpai and hand it to the Eldwa that's come over.

Senpai really is pretty.

Even in this world, she's considered a beautiful woman.

Given that, the other hero is probably attractive as well.

I'm kind of looking forward to meeting him, but it'll also be a pain.

「I want this sword fixed. Confirm whether you can do it or not.」(Makoto) I make this request to the craftsman as the leader of the company.

I've been told that it's not good to be overly friendly.

Especially when it comes to demi-humans, even if only in appearance, I should be pulling their strings properly.

It's what Rembrandt-san and Zara-san told me so I just assume they're correct and put it into practice, but it still feels uncomfortable.

「At once. Well then, I shall examine it now.」(Eldwa)

「Please do.」(Hibiki)

A serious expression returns to Senpai's face as she stares at the Eldwa holding the now-exposed sword and bows from her seated position.

She's even more polite than when she's talking to me...

I-I suppose she's Japanese after all; it's important to respect craftsmen, yes.

「It pains me to say this, but it seems that this has been put to use in unreasonable situations. I will work under the assumption that it has seen some fierce battles.」(Eldwa)「... Yes. It has saved my life many times.」(Hibiki)

The craftsman continues to examine the sword carefully and thoroughly.

I look towards him. He's noticed, so I talk to him through thought transmission.

[She said it's one of Beren's creations. It's fine if we take it back to Asora to show it to him there, so can you just accept it for now?] (Makoto) [This was Beren-dono's creation? I am still inexperienced, to not have noticed right away.] (Eldwa) [Please.] (Makoto)

[I will do as you say.] (Eldwa)

「Otonashi-sama, did you say your name was?」(Eldwa)

「Yes. How is it? Could it be repaired so that I can swing it as I originally did?」(Hibiki) 「There will be no problem. Now that I look closely, it is the creation of one of my colleagues. I believe sufficient work can be done on it if we are just given three days.」(Eldwa) 「Really! Then can I leave it to you?」(Hibiki)

「That is not for the likes of me to decide. I can make my own judgments, but not choose whether to accept your request.」(Eldwa) The Eldwa quickly glances at me.

I said it's fine.

We don't need to put on these little acts now.

「Of course, we will accept your request. It is a request from none other than my senpai. A fellow Japanese person that I've encountered in this other world.」(Makoto) 「Thanks, Misumi-kun.」(Hibiki)

「Not at all. You may leave, and make sure to handle it with care.」(Makoto) 「Please leave it to me. Well then, Otonashi-sama, I will take care of your weapon.」(Eldwa) Still holding the sword, the Eldwa bows his head low and exits the room. As I watch him leave, I exhale lightly and sink deeply into the sofa.

「As I thought, it was hard for you to maintain that attitude.」(Hibiki) 「I've been taught that when conducting myself as the head of a company, that kind of thing is necessary. You understand, after all?」(Makoto) 「I do. You were the kind of person who couldn't even take that sort of attitude with the kouhais in the club, weren't you?」(Hibiki) 「You are quite knowledgeable. I didn't think you would even remember me.」(Makoto) I was never the type to stand out.

「That might be true for you, Misumi-kun. But the archery club itself stood out a lot. By surviving in that club long enough to become its vice-president, you attracted a certain amount of interest. Ah, weren't you called a hero by some people in Nakakou*?」(Hibiki) TLN*: This is a contraction of the name of their high school, "中津原高校/Nakatsuhara Koukou".

「... Please don't make me remember such strange things. Even if I'm not

really good-looking, is it so strange for me to be in the archery club because I like bows?」(Makoto) I stayed in the archery club for over a year, even though I'm not really attractive. Because of that, I had this nickname that I wanted to get rid of.

Of course, there were a lot of people who joined the club with their eyes set on the good-looking members, so the first years were put through some tough training as soon as they joined.

That's how they filtered those people out.

With that, quite a lot of the ones that were only in it for the attractive people and had no interest in archery left. Selections were confirmed around fall each year, and the training became less harsh.

The fact that those attractive people survived through that could be called one of the seven wonders of the world.

I think that calling someone a hero just because they survive longer than a year is questionable, though.

Before I realize it, I've been reminiscing about the club and high school for the first time in a while.

「Of course. Hmm, I would definitely like to hear the story of how you came to this world in detail, but…」(Hibiki) 「But?」(Makoto)

「I'm suddenly feeling quite nostalgic now. I can't talk about these things to anyone else, so shall we talk about Japan some more?」(Hibiki) 「Eh?!」(Makoto)

Is that okay?

Talking about Japan would be much more enjoyable for me than being questioned about how I came to this world, so for that I'm grateful.

But this is that Otonashi Hibiki-senpai.

She's flawless in both her knowledge and her fighting skills.

The rumors I hear about her as a hero are nothing short of outstanding.

Is she the kind of person who would have these types of meaningless,

reminiscing conversations?

No, I don't think so.

「Oh yeah, this is something that happened quite a while before I came here, but there was an incident where the president of the archery club and a first-year girl who was rumored to be cute both got mad, right? I'm sure you remember it, since you were in the same club.」(Hibiki) …

I remember it clearly!

Wait, we're starting on a topic that I can't discuss?!

「Don't you know something about that, since you were the vice-president? I'm sure there were things that you couldn't say while you were back there, but now that we're here, there's some kind of physical statute of limitations so you can say them now, right?」(Hibiki) What the hell do you mean by physical statute of limitations!

「T-that's…」(Makoto)

「I've done everything that I needed to for today. They were all personal matters that I needed to take care of anyway, so I've been moving around separately from everyone else. I've sorted out the matter regarding my sword, as well. I'm sure it'll be good for both of us to think about our memories in Japan.」(Hibiki) When Senpai smiles, she really is beautiful.

I somehow remember our social statuses back on earth, and am pressured into simply nodding by the power of her smile.

With this relationship between senpai and kouhai, I get the feeling that I'm not allowed to agree or disagree. At least for me, who was part of a sports-related club.

Well, I don't have to be so cautious when talking about Japan.

The goddess, or Larva.

If I distract her from mentioning those topics, maybe I can settle things by just having a silly, enjoyable conversation between two people from the same town.

My conversation with Senpai, who is both a good speaker and a good

listener, is far livelier than I could've imagined.

We sit in the drawing room and have a long, pleasant conversation as we remember our hometown.

Chapter 174: Even more than being a hero

There's a nice smell.

Senpai moved to sit next to me at some point during our conversation. The faint fragrance of her hair is making me feel at ease.

Japan, the wastelands, Tsige...

No matter the topic, Senpai nods as if she's enjoying herself. She told me all kinds of things about her party.

Things like how her male knight's growth is promising but unreliable.

Or how she respects the girl who faces her duties as a priestess head on, even though she is still small.

Or how when she watches the male mage who's married, she realizes that even in another world, even if the husband is strong, men are still controlled by their wives.

She's surrounded by enjoyable companions and things in her country are apparently going well, for the most part.

As one would expect.

In the Limia Kingdom, there have recently been cries for... something like democracy? I've heard a little about people voicing their dissent at the idea of nobles being treated as superior. Senpai tells me they've been gathering followers and slowly making their plans.

Doesn't this mean that she's involved in politics as well? I'm honestly surprised.

As I thought, someone who's been a hero from the start and has become a key figure in the country is really something else.

I'm starting to get curious about the other hero as well.

Hibiki-senpai hasn't given me too many details about him.

She told me it's best if I meet him and talk to him myself.

However, when we were talking about the hero of the empire's power of

charming, Senpai's expression changed.

It became a strange look that showed both surprise and agreement at the same time.

Though it quickly changed back into a smile and our topic of conversation moved once more, so I didn't give it too much thought.

Oh yeah.

The question of how she met Beren and became close to him.

It'll probably be good to hear it from Senpai herself.

I'm a little interested to know how outsiders other than myself perceive Beren.

Our conversation about Tsige ended up switching topics to Tomoe and Mio as well as a lot of discussion about Rembrandt-san, so I didn't get to ask much about that kind of stuff.

「Ah, Hibiki-senpai. When you came to Tsige, how did you come to know Beren –」(Makoto) BANG.

「Eh?」(Makoto)

I let out a stupid-sounding voice in response to the violent opening of the door.

Standing there, holding a tray of drinks is… Mio.

Huh, Mio didn't have to bring them herself; she could've had someone else bring them.

Wait, Tomoe is there as well.

She suddenly pokes her head out from behind Mio with a smile.

Mio is kind of… really angry?

I mean, her eyes have a glassy look.

Her reaction to seeing me talking with other women has become calmer lately, but is she throwing some sort of fit?

「You two, I'm with a visitor. What is it, all of a sudden?」(Makoto) 「My

apologies, Waka. I said to Mio that we should wait at least until your thighs were touching, but it seems that your shoulders were the limit for her.」(Tomoe) Tomoe continues smiling as she directs her eyes at the gap between me and Senpai.

Thighs?

Shoulders?

…

Uoh!

Now that she mentions it, I look to see what she's talking about. Senpai was initially just sitting next to me, but now she's really close to me.

Our shoulders are indeed touching!

I was so engrossed in our conversation that I didn't notice!

For us to have been talking while this close without me noticing, I feel like I've been rude towards Senpai…

In any case, now that I've noticed, I put some normal distance between us.

Even if Mio wasn't having a fit, these are indeed circumstances that would make her angry, yes.

I don't have that kind of relationship with Senpai, and we weren't talking about anything romantic.

「Ah, err. Sorry, I didn't notice that kind of thing because I was so caught up in our conversation. I need to apologize to you as well, Hibiki-senpai.」(Makoto)「…」(Hibiki)

Huh?

There's no response from Senpai.

She's looking at Mio.

「… Hibiki, it's been a while, hasn't it?」(Mio)

Mio?

You know Senpai?

There's no way that's the case, huh.

They've never been in contact with each other.

「It has been some time, Mio-san. Because Raidou-san turned out to be Misumi-kun, I was half in doubt, but I suppose "Waka-sama" is referring to him after all.」(Hibiki) 「You don't need to tell me why you're here. But I didn't think you were the kind of girl who repaid kindness with ingratitude, you know, Hibiki? I'm grateful for your help with cooking, so I'll let you choose. Your left arm or your right. Which of them do you not need?」(Mio) ?!

Arm?!

「Mio! I was careless! Calm down! This person is my senpai, we came from the same hometown. We just got nostalgic and caught up in talking about the past, that's all, I'm telling you!」(Makoto) What a dangerous thing she is saying!

This isn't her usual light-hearted anger.

It seems that Senpai and Mio are acquainted with each other, but what is this?

And what did she mean by "help with cooking"?

... Cooking.

If I recall, I heard from Mio that she learned some recipes similar to Japanese-style food from an adventurer in Tsige.

But Senpai didn't say a single word about...

Hmm?

「Well, Mio earnestly... Wait, give me this tray.」(Tomoe) As Tomoe says this, she takes the tray that Mio is holding in silence.

Oh, Tomoe and Mio have different degrees of enthusiasm.

「If you're not answering, I'll tear off both of them.」(Mio) 「Mio, stop!」(Makoto)

I've been sitting between Senpai and Mio from the beginning, so I don't need to move.

I stand up where I am and face Mio.

Why does there have to be bloodshed over such a small thing?!

I'm living a more modest lifestyle than most men in this world, you know?!

「... Waka-sama.」(Mio)

Mio finally stops in her tracks.

Even so, just by being in this room, Senpai is already within Mio's range.

I can't relax.

I'll deploy my magic power armor in an invisible state so I can protect Senpai just in case.

Senpai stands up quietly behind me.

At that moment, I see the evening sun shining through the window.

We started talking just after noon, so we talked for quite a while.

「Mio-san, I had no intentions of doing anything to him. Despite my appearance, I am a hero after all. I don't have the time to be going out with a guy, anyway.」(Hibiki) She's perfectly right.

To be a hero and still have time to flirt with a lover, you'd need to be very skillful indeed.

I'm not even one of her party members; if Senpai and I were to date, it would have to be a long-distance relationship, right?

Not that there's any way Senpai would consider someone like me in the first place.

「Hero? I couldn't care less about something like that. Hibiki, are you saying you have no interest at all? Your expression said differently earlier. Weren't you being quite flirtatious?」(Mio) Couldn't care less, huh.

Normally you'd have more of a reaction to a girl standing before your

eyes telling you “I’m a hero”.

However.

Th-that’s quite a cold tone.

What do you mean by “flirtatious”, it’s not like we’re animals with an uncontrollable urge to breed.

「I was able to meet my cute kouhai, that’s all. The sword that I received when I met you, Mio-san, I came to have it repaired and happened to meet him by coincidence.」(Hibiki) 「That right! It was a coincidence! She is acquainted to you and Beren for some reason, and she happened to come to the Kuzunoha company and ran into me by pure coincidence! Do you understand?」(Makoto) 「… For over three hours?」(Mio)

「Uh, w-we got caught up in talking.」(Makoto)

「Waka-sama, when there were meetings that went for three hours you would fall asleep. Yet you had an enjoyable conversation that you got caught up in for even longer than that?」(Mio) Guh.

The times I fell asleep just coincided with the times when I was the most busy, didn’t they?

Mio is being quite malicious today.

But I’m sorry.

I’ll be careful.

「Really, I’m sorry. I lost track of the time. This person and I have a senpai-kouhai relationship, nothing more.」(Makoto) 「Yes. We went to the same school, but we barely even knew each other’s names. I was in quite a high social position in that world, so I got ahead of myself without thinking. I was being inconsiderate of you, Mio-san, I’m sorry.」(Hibiki) Hibiki-senpai lowers her head.

I don’t know the relationship between the two, but is Senpai the weaker one?

If they met in Tsige, were Senpai and her party among the babysitters in the wasteland?

I won't know if I don't ask about it later.

Thought transmission is blocked, so I can't ask anyway?

It's pretty hard to gain Mio's favor here.

I'm quite depressed.

「…」(Mio)

「Look, you've said this much to Waka already, you cannot be angry forever.」(Tomoe) Thanks, Tomoe.

For some reason, thought transmission isn't working on you either, but I can assume you're not angry?

「… Waka-sama, Ema is calling. Also, there are a few things that I would like you to sample, so let us head to the mansion.」(Mio) 「I-I see. Well, then, Senpai. Please take care on your way to Lorel.」(Makoto) 「… Yes. Joshua-sama wanted to get in touch with you, so would you please contact him in the near future?」(Hibiki) 「Ah, I understand. I'll do that in a few days' time.」(Makoto) 「Please do.」(Hibiki)

「Waka-sama!」(Mio)

Mio's voice is sharp.

I have to hurry.

「Let us be on our way… He shouldn't have given her that sword, mumble mumble…」(Mio) As I walk towards Mio and Tomoe, who are standing at the door that was wrenched open, Mio starts to rush me even more.

She's saying something inappropriate, too.

That sword of Beren's, Mio had something to do with it as well, huh.

「Waka, please leave the hero in my care. Allow me escort her back.」(Tomoe) 「Tomoe? I don't think you need to worry about Senpai that much, you know?」(Makoto) 「No no, it is just that she is a guest of the Kuzunoha company. We must treat her properly. Lime is busy at the moment and I, fortunately, happen to have some free time.」(Tomoe) 「Her

left and right arms are off-limits, alright?」(Makoto)「Please do not treat me like I am the same as Mio. We will just have a small conversation. I will not harm her.」(Tomoe)「In that case, I'll leave that to you.」(Makoto)

「As you wish.」(Tomoe)

It seems Tomoe isn't that angry, so I guess it should be fine.

!

Could she be planning to look through Senpai's memories?

Senpai has knowledge on some things that I don't, so it's possible.

Should I stop her?

No.

If the depths of Asora's knowledge isn't seen, then it won't be found, I suppose.

... I wonder why.

Maybe it's because all of my own memories have been exposed; I feel a little reluctant to let it happen to someone else.

I have to change my way of thinking on these kinds of things.

I leave the company room together with Mio and head for Asora.

At this time of day, we can have a short break and still be able to return to the company before dinner, huh.

We can close the shop and check our inventory then.

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TLN: This section is now switched to Tomoe's point of view, which is immediately apparent in Japanese but not in English, so I'm leaving this TLN here to clarify that.

Ooh.

Organizing information is a hectic thing.

Waka and Mio have returned to Asora, and I am accompanying the hero of Limia, Otonashi Hibiki, along the street as I told Waka I would.

She was sitting so close to Waka in the drawing room, but she did not show any expression of having an ulterior motive. Finding out exactly what this girl gained from that conversation is one of my objectives.

I'm secretly looking through her memories, but from the conversation with Waka earlier, it seems she has gathered most of the available information about Waka as Raidou of the Kuzunoha company.

「Err, Tomoe-san? I'll be fine on my own.」(Hibiki)

「I am not sure if you are aware, hero-dono, but this city recently suffered great damage at the hands of monsters known as mutants. I cannot allow even the smallest chance of something happening to a guest of Waka's. Please forgive me.」(Tomoe) 「I see... Umm, Tomoe-san, are you also one of Misumi-kun's subordinates?」(Hibiki) 「Of course. Ah yes, hero-dono, I think you have heard that Waka is using the false name, "Raidou". When you refer to Waka, please use either Misumi or Raidou. Since using the name "Makoto" would only invite chaos.」(Tomoe) 「I know. He told me the same. Well, I heard about this company that started in the wasteland, but you really do employ many demi-humans, don't you?」(Hibiki) Hmm.

To start with, I have been predominantly examining her memories of their earlier conversation.

Waka, you said quite a lot.

Though you were made to talk.

You seemed to have excluded your relationship with the goddess, but you talked about the wasteland, Tsige and Rotsgard.

You have given a considerable amount of information to this girl.

You have managed to keep quiet about Shiki, who she is acquainted with, and Asora. But you have talked a great deal about the academy lecturers and the mutant attack.

Hmm, Ilumgand?

If I recall, that was the student that began the attack.

It seems that she is quite concerned about him, but even Waka does not know everything about that matter.

It seems that this girl, Hibiki, tried to learn something about that student but quickly gave up.

Even we have not got a full grasp of their relationship.

The students did about 80% of the damage, and Mio finished him off, huh?

All Waka knows is that the students defeated him.

The only ones who know about how he was finished are Mio and myself.

I should poke around this topic.

It would be troublesome if we allowed it to be an issue in the future.

Whatever the case may be, I am relieved that they seem not to have touched on the topic of Waka and Shiki going wild in Limia.

For some reason, in Hibiki's mind, she has decided that the person dressed in a white suit is a hyuman.

I'll find out how she came to that conclusion later.

Because Hibiki believes Waka is a human, she believes them to be two different people.

... But this is a little dangerous.

Waka has given enough information to Hibiki that she could assume that his parents were hyumans.

If we are not careful, she could come to that conclusion.

「Waka does not discriminate against demi-humans, so he can truly appreciate their great abilities. That is one reason. Since you are from the same town as him, hero-dono, would you not think the same?」(Tomoe)

「... Yes, at first. But as I learn of this this world's customs and traditions, I realize that people who think like me are in the minority. I think that the relationship between humans and demi-humans is one of the problems

that cause wars, but what we need to immediately deal with is the war that is happening right now. I will not condone the hyumans' attitude towards demi-humans, but I will not outright deny it, either.」(Hibiki)「So you tolerate their behavior.」(Tomoe)

That is a safe thing to do.

Even though Waka and Hibiki both lived in Japan, they have quite different ways of thinking.

「Though my common sense still hinders me in that regard. For us, demi-humans are just people who have different features like a tail or ears. But hyumans view them as servants and... to say it bluntly, livestock.」(Hibiki)「Yes, you have a point.」(Tomoe)

「No matter how beneficial demi-humans are to hyumans, hyumans rarely acknowledge the rights of demi-humans. I've noticed recently that Misumi-kun treating demi-humans so well is causing him to be seen as some kind of unusual pet enthusiast. As a hero, it is difficult to conduct myself that way.」(Hibiki)「For someone who exudes charisma, that is quite a calculative thing to say, hero-dono.」(Tomoe)「It's exactly as you say. I am a calculative, shrewd person. The aristocracy in Limia must be reformed and the empire must be held back through diplomacy before I can raise the societal status of demi-humans. Of course, this is assuming that we win the war.」(Hibiki)「You desire a lot, hero-dono. You are different to what I imagined, but I do not dislike that. I see. Well, I can confirm that there was a passionate supporter in this city.」(Tomoe) I suppose I will begin now.

「A supporter, you say? Supporting me? I am happy to hear that there are such people, even in this academy city that is so far from the kingdom.」(Hibiki)「Indeed. He is deceased now, but he was an academy student. The second son of the Hoperaise* family from Limia, a boy by the name of Ilumgand. He had quite a troublesome personality, but he had considerable faith in you, hero-dono.」(Tomoe) TLN*: Was previously translated by Reigokai as Hopelace「!」(Hibiki)

「But he was in quite a bad temper before the school festival. In the end,

he turned into a monster during a team competition and began attacking the other students. If I recall, the king of your country also saw this incident.」(Tomoe) Hooh.

So Ilumgand was acquainted with Hibiki.

Fu, he is speaking of his ideals with shining, innocent eyes.

They met when Hibiki was acting to remind the kingdom's nobles of their duties.

The little I saw of Ilumgand was after he had already lost his sanity, but I understand now. The Ilumgand in Hibiki's memories is indeed a respectable young man.

It seems that he was passionate about his ideals, enthusiastic in lectures and wanted to be of use to the hero once he graduated.

Words coming from a face whose expression is full of admiration cannot be lies.

I am curious as to why he turned insane and was killed.

「... Did Ilum-kun, Ilumgand, really do such coward-like acts, go on a rampage and finally get eliminated?」(Hibiki) 「There is no mistake. Waka also saw it. There may have been a reason for it, but it was something that Ilumgand caused himself. His strange behavior prior to that is also known by other academy students and employees of the Kuzunoha company.」(Tomoe) 「Even everyone in the Kuzunoha company?」(Hibiki)

「Indeed. Because for some reason, he saw Waka as his mortal enemy and interfered with his activities. He pressured the guild, used companies in Limia to harass Waka and even disturbed his students. I pity the students who were affected by that.」(Tomoe) 「... He was one of my sympathizers. Among the nobles, he was a rare person who put proper thought towards the well-being of the people. The Hoperaise family is mourning his passing.」(Hibiki) 「One's reputation can change many times in the eyes of the people. But if he had such a side to him, it is unfortunate that he was lost.」(Tomoe) 「No matter what, I can't bring myself to believe he transformed like that.」(Hibiki) 「Both the academy

and the kingdom of Limia are investigating the cause. I am sure the truth will be revealed eventually.」(Tomoe)「I think there was definitely something that caused it.」(Hibiki) … She has no proof, but she believes there was a cause.

Is it some kind of intuition?

However, she is right.

Whether she will have the chance to find out just what kind of intervention the demons are capable of is another matter.

Fufu, and this is…

I've found something good.

This girl has learned kendo and swordsmanship!

This is good.

I may be able to touch on real swordsmanship.

「Hero-dono, if I recall, you were planning to leave the academy city?」(Tomoe)「Huh, ah, yes. That's right. Coming here was a decision that I made independently.」(Hibiki) Hibiki is surprised by this abrupt change in conversation topic.

But I am also surprised.

Why did you and Waka learn swordsmanship from the same person?

And neither you nor Waka are aware of this.

I think I can see even more of their teacher's swordsmanship in her memories than Waka's.

What a stroke of good fortune this is.

「From the fact that you left a sword in our care, can I assume that you are a master of the sword?」(Tomoe)「I don't have it with me, but I've left a sword with the academy. Bastard swords are the easiest to use, aren't they?」(Hibiki) I do not have any interest in such swords.

「Since you are from the same town as Waka, can you use a katana?」(Tomoe)「Katana…」(Hibiki)

Hibiki looks at the sword at my waist.

Has she sensed it?

I will not allow you to refuse.

I did defend you from Mio, though only through words.

「I did learn how to use Japanese katanas in my hometown. Speaking of which, Tomoe-san, you give off the impression of a samurai. Are there samurai and Japanese katanas in this world as well?」(Hibiki) 「No, this is just a hobby of mine. Since learning about this from Waka, I have been completely caught up in it.」(Tomoe) 「Hobby? Huh, I see.」(Hibiki)

「I would like to humbly request instruction!」(Tomoe)

「From me?! Err, if you are as strong as Mio-san, then you are far stronger than I am.」(Hibiki) 「A contest between swordswomen. I will prepare a katana for you. There are plenty of suitable places at the academy and I will not take much of your time!」(Tomoe) Techniques with a Japanese sword.

I can see the details in Hibiki's memories, but nothing could be better than seeing it in person.

「But I would like to hurry and meet up with everyone else…」(Hibiki) 「Then I shall escort you there after our contest! It is decided, let us go, hero-dono!」(Tomoe) Muh!

What do you mean by,「She is just a companion of Mio, they're two similar people」?!

How dare you remember something so rude!

Even if I make selfish requests such as these, I make sure to prepare benefits for my opponents as well!

Chapter 175: Troubling matters

「Hey, Onee-chan? What's wrong? Weren't you supposed to come back tomorrow?」(Chiya) Hibiki replies with an embarrassed look on her face.

「... That was the plan. But it looks like I've caught up with you.」(Hibiki)「Did your business in Rotsgard go well?」(Chiya)

「Yes. We were supposed to gather just before we enter Lorel, but now it looks like I can enjoy the view of the Gold Highway.」(Hibiki)「Being together with Onee-chan makes me happy!」(Chiya)

「Me too. Ah, sorry, Chiya-chan. I was busy today, so I'll go to bed first.」(Hibiki)「Mhmm, see you tomorrow. Good night.」(Chiya)

Hibiki's face does indeed look a little pale. As Chiya sees her off, she assumes it is just fatigue.

Hibiki hired an extra room in the inn, some distance away from the rest of her party. She enters the room and throws herself onto the bed.

She lets out a large sigh.

(The inside of my head feels like mush. I did everything I needed to do in Rotsgard, but the final matter with the Kuzunoha company really wore me out. I'm thankful for the restoration of the kingdom and the fact that we managed to negotiate for command over the academy's mage corps, but to think that there was another Japanese person here other than that from the empire. Someone I know, even. At this rate, I can use our senpai-kouhai relationship from when were in Japan to hear reliable information from him. But his identity as Raidou is problematic. He's the representative of a company with unknown influence. Even his majesty and Joshua-sama acknowledge their power. It seems they want to have the company as their ally, but...) Hibiki considers the information she gained in her conversation with Raidou, AKA Makoto, in relation to what she already knew about the Kuzunoha company.

(He was hiding it, but the reason he's using a fake name is because he doesn't want his whereabouts to be known by the goddess, right? I didn't

feel a shred of respect for her in his words. I was summoned in a castle, but he told me that he was summoned at some corner of the world. It's probably true, but if that's the case then it's basically indirect murder. Which means that it's quite likely that Misumi-kun and the goddess don't have a good relationship. Is it alright to accept someone like that as an ally? That company's equipment and Mio-san are absolutely excellent. I wonder what I should do. I'm not worried about him as much as Tomoki, but imagining what could happen after the war, Misumi-kun's existence is...) When the war between humans and demons eventually reaches a conclusion, anyone who endangers the kingdom of Limia's existence would be undesirable.

For Hibiki, who thinks that the goddess's system should continue in this world even after the war, Makoto seems like he could become an attractive source of military power. But at the same time, she thinks he has shown some signs that he could become a source of evil.

(There's no doubt that Tomoki will set out to unite the world after the demons are defeated. It would be impressive if those ambitions that he put no effort into hiding were only a bluff, but I'm sure that's not the case. If I were to ask Misumi-kun for assistance and he turned out to be the goddess's enemy, it is quite possible that it would become a great reason for the empire to start a war between hyumans. That would be bad. We don't even know if we'll win the war against the demons, but that doesn't mean that we can just focus on what's in front of us and hope for the best. So the safest option is to associate with them purely just as a company at first, then slowly request military power. Even then, a request from just Limia and myself is a hand we can only play in a situation where we have no other choice.) She knows that the Kuzunoha company is powerful.

Hibiki has seen that first hand.

Hibiki considers a truly ideal scenario where, just as the demons are brought to the brink of annihilation, the Kuzunoha company would use the Devil to face the empire, have the two destroy each other and then be defeated.

She might appear heartless in comparison to Makoto, even though they are both Japanese. But during their conversation, Makoto did not give any impression of being on either the hyumans' side or the demons' side. Hibiki has an ominous feeling about him that will not disappear. So she has decided that as a hero, she should make her decisions without taking into account her personal feelings.

Her decisions have too much impact for her to think things like "I will believe him because I know him" or "I can relax because we went to the same high school".

(We don't even know the background behind Larva and that white guy. This is just a hunch, but the one who blew away Stella is that white Devil. I thought I could get some kind of lead on him if I came to the academy city, but I suppose it's impossible to get that sort of information in only one day. I have a feeling I can figure something out in Lorel as well, so there's still some hope. With regards to Misumi-kun, Joshua-sama is summoning him and I have to return to the kingdom as well, so I'll meet him in the kingdom in the near future and ascertain his standpoint there. It's not a good idea to investigate too much right now, since that person called Tomoe-san gave me a warning.) Hibiki remembers the blue-haired woman who is the very reason she was able to meet up with her party so quickly in the first place.

She is confused as to what to think about Tomoe.

(She should probably be about as strong as Mio-san. She was someone I can't understand no matter how hard I try. She seemed to know the basic way of handling a katana, but she's either never been through a competition between katana-users or she's just inexperienced at fighting. Even so, her stance was quite solid. Ah, that's what it reminds me of. It felt like a staged sword fight. What exactly has she been doing to learn how to use a sword like that? I don't understand her. I don't think Misumi-kun has any understanding of kendo or swordsmanship, but I wonder if you would be able to have such a solid foundation just by hearing a report on how it's done. That company has far too many secrets.) After Tomoe had insisted on it, they spent almost an hour at the

academy having a contest with katanas.

The only magic they used were strengthening magic and healing magic, so it was a true contest of sword techniques. Hibiki won nine out of ten matches.

Tomoe's powerful technique that made use of her physical ability had taken Hibiki by surprise initially, but Hibiki won the rest of the matches afterwards.

To Hibiki, who has studied kendo for a long time and even learned proper swordsmanship, Tomoe was but an inexperienced swordswoman.

However.

(She recovered straight away even after I cut her, didn't she? Though she did say that she had prepared healing magic in advance.) It was a truly spectacular magic.

To the point that Hibiki unconsciously watched her in fascination.

After a deep blow that Hibiki had thought might even endanger Tomoe's life, Tomoe had stood up as if nothing had happened. Hibiki was completely shocked.

Hibiki had immediately decided to make it one of her objectives to find out whether Tomoe would be able to demonstrate such an ability a second time.

Tomoe did give her an explanation.

She willingly explained to Hibiki how the magic works.

It was not exactly a deal they agreed upon, but in exchange, Hibiki taught Tomoe a way to train the Japanese sword's iai*.

TLN*: This is the art of drawing your sword, cutting down your opponent with the same movement and then sheathing the sword afterwards.

(As a swordswoman, her physical strength is terrifying, but not particularly special otherwise. She probably normally uses magic to fight. I defeated her that many times and yet she wasn't even upset about it. But

more importantly…) Tomoe, Mio, Makoto.

And Larva, whom she might be able to find clues about in Lorel.

In addition to that, the restoration of the kingdom, the empire's movements and the war with the demons.

Even though she is exhausted, Hibiki does not stop thinking about the various subjects that float into her mind as she goes through a sleepless night.

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I'm naïve to think that winter would stop the development of the land.

Are you serious?

Ema is in a bad mood, which is unusual for her. After hearing the situation, it seems she is unhappy that Kaleneon's farmable land is expanding slower than expected.

Apparently I'm naïve for believing that snow falling on the land is a valid reason for that.

Kaleneon's a northern, inland area with lots of mountains, so my only thought was that it would be unreasonable to try to develop the land during the winter.

According to the Super Secretary Ema, it wouldn't be a problem if magic was used.

I had this thought during the restoration of Rotsgard as well, but we're in a situation where we have to use magic for all kinds of work.

… There's no shortage of workers capable of that among the demi-humans that are temporarily working in Kaleneon, but still…

I asked Root to secretly move hyuman and demi-human adventurers that pass certain requirements to Kaleneon as immigrants. It's normal for those kinds of people to have a lifestyle where they're doing some work on the side, anyway.

I need more information than just what Ema has told me, so I'll make a

decision on how to deal with the situation after I hear from the Ansland sisters in Kaleneon.

More importantly, I need to focus on the present.

「Tomoe, explain. What's with those torn-up clothes?」(Makoto)

This is the problem at hand right now.

「How good of you to ask! I asked the hero Hibiki to demonstrate her knowledge of true swordsmanship. Well, we had a small contest. These are wounds of honor, so to speak!」(Tomoe) 「Where is the honor in having a contest for your hobby?」(Makoto) 「Let us not worry about the small details! She was amazing, Waka. Her sword moved like this so quickly, and in the next instant, it was slashing back at me! I think that the trick to this would be to use the wrist and the back. It really surprised me!」(Tomoe) 「... It's amazing that only your clothes got torn.」(Makoto)

「No? My blood scattered through the air multiple times. I was healing at the same time, so it was not a problem. Though I cannot repair my clothing, so that is why I am in this state.」(Tomoe) Tomoe touches her torn clothes. She seems like she's enjoying herself.

They fought each other with real swords...

「Weren't you supposed to stop Senpai from being exposed to danger?!」(Makoto) 「Of course. I did not use most of my magic and we fought only using swords; in my current state, there is no way I can land an attack on her.」(Tomoe) 「So you thought it would be fine because you can't hit her, seriously, you. It's not just a matter of healing yourself when you get cut, is it?! Do you think I'd find it interesting to imagine you being cut?」(Makoto) There's no way I'd find that interesting.

I'd be worried instead!

「Muh, that's... It was a little rash of me.」(Tomoe)

「Katana this, katana that. I know I can't give you a match using a katana. But take care of yourself a little more! You understand me?!」(Makoto) 「I will be certain to take care from now on.」(Tomoe)

「Good.」(Makoto)

Now that I see Tomoe seriously reflecting on her actions, I'll forgive her.

「So? What happened to Senpai?」(Makoto)

「It seems that her main objectives were to secure the academy's cooperation to assist with the restoration of the kingdom, as well as the assistance of our company, which she also has business with.」(Tomoe) 「Tomoe-san! What's with your appearance! You told me to calm down, and then you went and punished Hibiki, didn't you?! Isn't that unfair?!」(Mio) Mio has barged in, right in the middle of Tomoe's explanation.

In her hand is... an octopus?

She's holding a bright-red octopus.

Boiled whole?

Even for a new dish, that's quite amazing.

But octopus, huh.

「I just fell over! It has nothing to do with Hibiki!」(Tomoe)

「Where would you have to fall for your clothes to be cut to ribbons like that?! If you are going to play dumb, please think of a better excuse! I had things I wanted to say to Hibiki as well, but I held myself back! If you are going to do such things, Tomoe-san, then I will do as I please as well!」(Mio) Oi!

「Unfortunately, Hibiki is no longer in Rotsgard. I politely escorted her back to her party.」(Tomoe) 「... Waka-sama! Tomoe-san is horrible!」(Mio)

「Ah, jeez. I already scolded Tomoe a little while ago. Oh, that octopus looks delicious. Did you boil it?」(Makoto) 「Octopus? A-ah. I am just checking the salt seasoning, but it has been boiled quite well. I would certainly like Waka-sama to try it.」(Mio) Mio is even explaining how she cooked it.

「Waka, you have grown used to dealing with Mio. That is very reassuring.」(Tomoe) 「As for you, go and get changed first. You know that

Mio and Shiki have been obsessed with seafood cuisine these days, don't you? Let's eat together. I'll hear your detailed explanation then.」(Makoto) Mio and Shiki have been going to port cities recently to stock up on seafood.

I sometimes participate in the cooking if they're using ingredients that I'm familiar with.

Mio wants to increase her number of seafood recipes and Shiki apparently wants to collaborate with Gotetsu and do research into making nabe with seafood. Their interests coincide, so they often go out together.

Shiki was in high spirits today, saying that he'd be putting crab in a nabe.

He's holed himself up in Asora's kitchen, going through a trial-and-error process to test out different combinations of various soups and vegetables.

He was enthusiastically combining the different soups that he received from Gotetsu.

I say he's combining them, but it feels more like a drug manufacturing process. I'm looking forward to the final product.

「Shiki is making a nabe today, correct? It seems much more promising than Mio, who merely boiled her ingredient. I am looking forward to it.」(Tomoe) 「… Merely boiled?」(Mio)

Mio's eyebrows are raised.

Oh man, should I follow up on this?

I cut one of the legs of the octopus that Mio has brought and hold it in my hand.

「… Tomoe.」(Makoto)

「Huh? … Muguh!」(Tomoe)

「Is this the taste of something that has been merely boiled?」(Makoto) 「… This is delicious. Hmm.」(Tomoe)

「Is there something you'd like to say to Mio?」(Makoto)

「... Mio, I apologize. This is very delicious. I am sorry for saying that it has been merely boiled.」(Tomoe) Tomoe earnestly bows her head in apology.

「... It is fine as long as you understand. I have other dishes prepared, so you can look forward to them as well.」(Mio) Octopus, huh.

Excellent!

「By the way, Mio. What dishes are you planning to use an octopus for?」(Makoto)「Let's see...」(Mio)

Mio lists out her planned menu for me.

She's not listing anything that I can make.

Let's add two items to the dining table.

There's still time for that.

「Well then, I'll make something too.」(Makoto)

「Oh! It has been a while!」(Tomoe)

「What kind of dish will it be?」(Mio)

「One will be the nabe and the other will be a dish using flour. Tako-shabu and takoyaki!」(Makoto) TLN: タコ/Tako = octopus. しゃぶ/Shabu is a shortened form しゃぶしゃぶ/shabu-shabu, which is a type of nabe/hot pot dish that typically has thin slices of meat. Takoyaki is balls of flour batter filled with octopus. And now I'm hungry.

Shiki will probably enjoy it, since it's a nabe.

I've never showed them a shabu-shabu before, so it should be fresh for them.

Mio is always interested in new dishes no matter what they are.

Tomoe is looking forward to my cooking as well.

This is also my chance to redeem myself.

I remember the time I asked the Dwarves to make me an iron plate to

make takoyaki with.

It’s a bitter memory.

I’d prepared the ingredients before realizing.

I had no octopus.

Nobody was selling them at all. I wanted to cry.

In the end, I used shreds of chicken meat to make toriyaki*, but I felt a true sense of defeat that time.

TLN*: トリ/Tori = bird, so toriyaki is what he has named this failed dish which is basically takoyaki with chicken in place of the octopus. Don’t see what wrong with it, sounds delicious to me.

I couldn’t show anyone my failure, so I ended up eating it all by myself.

I can finally sweep away my trauma.

Now then, let’s go to the kitchen.

Chapter 176: Feeling as if in a dream

「Welcome to the Lorel Union. We are honored by your presence, hero Hibiki-sama.」(Sairitsu) A woman wearing a robe bows her head respectfully as she offers words of welcome to her guest.

As Hibiki thanks the woman for her kind words, she senses a coldness to the woman's behavior.

It is very faint, and has completely vanished by the time the woman speaks her next words, so Hibiki decides to overlook it for now.

「Welcome back, Chiya-sama. You are aware that everyone has been anticipating the priestess-sama's return?」(Sairitsu) 「Sorry it's taken me so long, Sai. It'll only be for a little while, but I've come back together with Onee-chan. Hey, Sai. Hibiki-onee-chan –」(Chiya) 「Chiya-sama, I would love to listen to such details leisurely at a later time. For now, I am sure you are tired from your long journey, so we will now lead you to the rooms that everyone will be staying in.」(Sairitsu) The one who has come out to meet the hero, the visitor from Limia, is Sairitsu, one of Lorel's influential people.

The existence of Lorel's priestess is openly known to the public, and the people adore her.

Sairitsu has significant power, holding a position where she governs those around her.

She is a representative worthy of being sent to welcome important visitors from other countries.

The religious importance of the priestess makes Sairitsu's position much more influential than it originally was.

She is "strong" in various ways that exceed Misumi Makoto's impression of her as a powerful leader in her country.

She looks at her subordinates, signalling for them to begin leading the guests. As she watches the hero, the priestess and their companions leave, she confirms her plans with another subordinate.

「Sairitsu-sama? Is there something wrong?」

「... I just thought, we wished for the priestess's return to our country so desperately, however.」(Sairitsu)「The diplomacy employed by everyone, including yourself, Sairitsu-sama, is showing results.」

「... If that really were the case, I would be feeling happier.」(Sairitsu)「Sairitsu-sama, Chiya-sama has returned, so I think it is best not to worry so much. In the same way that Limia treated our country, if we have the priestess-sama stay in Lorel from now on, that will be –」

「You. If one only thinks of returning the treatment that one has been dealt without considering the time and situation, it will lead to the worst possible outcome. Be sure to engrave this lesson into your mind. At the very least, we will not be able to do it on this occasion. Though if Chiya-sama is forced to take part in the war, there will be plenty of opportunities.」(Sairitsu)「M-my apologies. I have said too much.」

「There is also everything that has occurred until now. I do not condemn you for feeling animosity towards Limia. But the reality is that Chiya-sama strongly supports the hero from the bottom of her heart. She came here "for a little while" of her own volition. The thing I am more worried about is...」(Sairitsu) (That would be the fact that when Raidou requested the Dragon Knights prolong their stay in Rotsgard to help the city's restoration, it felt more like he was making a demand. "I may be able to meet the priestess-sama soon", huh... Even though Limia and Lorel are both considered part of the four great powers, I do not believe them to be equal. But we are still a great country; even diplomatic measures would not grant him what he requested, yet he got what he wanted so easily... I would like to have Chiya-sama examine him once. I wonder if I should have her stop by Rotsgard on her way back. It seems that she has already realized that the hero Hibiki is a wise person; maybe she could find something out about Raidou. Fu, if he thought those words were merely to console me, how relieved he must be.)「Sairitsu-sama?」

「... It is nothing. Things will be busy from now on. I will be relying on you.」(Sairitsu)「Please leave it to me! I will serve Chiya-sama with everything I have!」

「Well then, let us go.」(Sairitsu)

Sairitsu remembers the person she met in Rotsgard not long ago.

His suggestion to have the Dragon Knights stay to help with the city's restoration, and his offer in return.

There is no way a single company would have the power to influence the movements of the hero or the priestess, let alone an entire great country.

Normally, this would be the case.

Currently, the priestess has made her anticipated return to Lorel and brought the hero with her.

Though it is temporary, this is still a major event.

She must not focus all of her attention on that.

Even so.

Sairitsu cannot erase Raidou's name and the Kuzunoha company from her mind.

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TLN: This section will be really confusing without a TLN, so I shall add one. In this section, there are TWO Makotos - one who is watching the scene and whose perspective the narrative is from, and one who is participating in the scene. The author doesn't distinguish which is which in the text and simply uses pronouns like "I/me/my" for both, which can be slightly confusing, but hopefully you won't have too much trouble following it.

I was there.

「You weren't a hyuman after all.」(Makoto)

「You, monster.」

「I don't think I want to be called that by you, since you're still talking despite the large hole in your stomach.」(Makoto) 「I must not allow you to meet Hibiki-sama...! No matter the cost, I will stop you here...!」

I'm facing a guy wearing black armor.

But he's kneeling and has a large hole in his stomach, like I said.

From the way he's speaking, I think I probably did it.

So, is this guy one of Senpai's acquaintances?

「A black knight, huh. Is this the supposed loyalty of a knight?」(Makoto) A black knight.

I've never heard of them.

But it seems he knows me.

I look at that place in a really absentminded way.

It's like there's one me who is the performer, and another me who's the audience.

The heavily wounded person who's apparently a black knight has had his solid-looking helmet broken to reveal the face of a demi-human, not a hyuman. No, his face is a "wrinkled yet smooth" face that might not even be that of a demi-human.

「Raidou, no matter what, I will stop you here!」(Black knight) A greatsword that would be better suited for smashing rather than cutting its target is being swung down at me.

I stop it with my bare hands.

I'm not even using my magic power armor.

I just grabbed the sword with my hands and stopped it.

No way, I shouldn't be able to do something like this.

It was travelling quite fast, wasn't it?

「Hey, do you know what a microwave oven is?」(Makoto)
「Microwave...?」(Black knight)

「Ahaha, sorry, sorry. Forget it. Oh yeah. Could you tell me your name? Surely your name isn't "black knight"?」(Makoto) I hear my voice that has no hints of tension in it.

There are two of me; this is a strange sensation.

The surroundings…

I look around anxiously.

There is rubble scattered everywhere, and the air is filled with fire, smoke and noise.

It's a battlefield.

「My name, you say? Fu, kukukuku! You do not know? You should have seen many, many others with the same unsightly appearance as me at that place! And you buried them all!」(Black knight) The black knight points at himself as he shouts the word "unsightly".

「… I don't know. I don't remember. What, do you have some kind of grudge against me?」(Makoto) 「The academy city! Rotsgard! The school festival! Are you going to say you have even forgotten all of those, Raidou?!」(Black knight) 「Ah, the mutants, huh. In fact, you're kind of similar to them. So you're one of the mutants who survived? But you know, the ones who transformed in that incident were just suffering the consequences of their own actions in a way, weren't they? I don't think it's reasonable to have a grudge against me, is it?」(Makoto) 「I am…」(Black knight)

「Huh?」(Makoto)

「I am Ilumgand Hoperaise!」(Ilumgand)

?!

Ilumgand?!

Huh, but if I recall, he was supposed to have been killed during the school festival by Amelia…

「Ilumgand, huh. The mutant attack itself is a thing of the past, so I don't really remember individual names. But Ilumgand Hoperaise, right. I got it.」(Makoto) But perhaps I really don't remember his name; as I face Ilumhand, I don't seem to have any particularly strong reaction.

I wonder what this bad feeling I'm getting is.

「You, how far do you have to go to make fools of people before you…!」(Ilumgand)「Despite being ridiculously tough, it looks like you can't fix that hole in your stomach, so this is the end of the show. I'll make sure to finish you properly. Now there's nobody left in Senpai's party except that priestess, and even though I'm clumsy, I can finally put her into checkmate.」(Makoto) Checkmate?

Senpai's party?

What kind of situation is this?

Despite the strangeness of these circumstances, the me standing there doesn't question anything as he extends his left hand towards the black knight.

「You would tell me in advance that you intend to finish me?!」(Ilumgand) Ilumgand kicks the dirt as he tries to escape from the palm that is coming towards him.

But he snaps back to his original position, as if colliding with something, and stumbles.

Is that a barrier?

But its range doesn't include my surroundings.

It looks like it's been set up to act as a wall that encloses Ilumgand completely.

What is that, isn't that unfair?!

A barrier that doesn't have the caster at its center, that's some super-evil skill, you know?!

「Back to my earlier topic, the microwave oven. It's a tool used to heat up food.」(Makoto)「Why… How can someone like you possess so much power?! Someone like you, who does not hold any faith!」(Ilumgand)「At first, I thought "wow, the inside of the oven gets really hot~", you know? But that's not what happens. These wave-like things cause tiny vibrations in whatever's inside, or something? It's quite amazing technology.」(Makoto) Ah, I've heard something like this before.

It causes the molecules to vibrate, I think?

Even though it's a familiar, convenient household appliance, I remember being amazed that it's such a complicated thing.

Though it's only a vague memory of having seen this explanation on television or something.

But what is this me thinking, saying such things in another world, to an enemy, no less?

As this question occurs to me, he says something strange.

「Well then, what do you think would happen if you did that to a person?」(Makoto)「... I do not know what you are trying to say. Are you trying to tell me that you want to burn me to death?」(Ilumgand)「That's what you'd assume would happen, right? Either that, or you'd think that it'd be something like being boiled to death. But that's not quite right. It's like being disintegrated through something like magic, but there's no need to deal with a corpse afterwards.」(Makoto) Something like magic, huh.

He's referring to the barrier, I guess.

Still.

Hey, hey.

What would happen if you put someone in a microwave?

What a vulgar way to kill someone.

I've never even imagined that before.

「... Be sure to remember this. You will definitely receive your punishment. Hibiki-sama or the goddess-sama will definitely punish you. The world will never acknowledge you.」(Ilumgand)「I'd be happy about that. If they were to come to me, it'd save me a lot of trouble. Well then, bye-bye.」(Makoto)「Ilum-kun!」

Unbelievably, a woman's voice calling Ilumgand's name comes with perfect timing.

「Ah, Hibiki-senpai.」(Makoto)

The owner of the voice is Senpai.

I call out Senpai's name as if nothing has happened.

A person swells up and bursts.

He explodes like a balloon being popped, armor and all.

The inside of the hemispherical, invisible barrier that was surrounding Ilumgand is painted red and black.

Ugh.

"Microwave".

I definitely didn't think that's what he meant.

What have I done?

To imagine that there is such a way for a person to die.

The red hemisphere quickly disappears and all that's left is a large red stain on the ground.

It's hard to believe someone just died there.

There's no corpse or even a single shred of flesh left.

「Misumi-kun, you...!」(Hibiki)

「How dare you do this to Ilum-san!」(Chiya)

Senpai and the young priestess saw this sight as soon as they arrived here, and now they're glaring at me.

With eyes full of anger and hatred.

I can't blame them, since they just saw one of their companions die right before their eyes.

But was Ilumgand an ally of Senpai's known as the black knight?

Not only that, but I think the hatred towards me in the eyes of those two is clearly not something that was only just born from this event.

There's no signs of surprise or confusion; they started glaring at me

with loathing and fury straight away, which means that from the very beginning...

Wait, it can't be!

My face is pointed downwards slightly, and my mouth twists visibly into a smile.

I'm shocked.

You're kidding, right?

Why am I doing such a thing?!

What are Tomoe, Mio and Shiki doing?!

There is no particular emotion in my eyes.

Only the very ends of my mouth are pointed upwards in a smile.

As I raise my face, my left hand is pointed towards Senpai and the priestess.

Oi, stop it.

Please stop?

「It seems you were too late. I will end you quickly, and then the goddess is next. I think it will not even be painful.」(Makoto) STOP!

「I have completely misjudged you. It's too late for me to realize this now, when there is no going back, so I'm really left with no other choice.」(Hibiki)「Well, that's life. Ah, Senpai.」(Makoto)

I'm showing no signs of bloodlust at all.

But I understand what the actions of my future self mean.

Don't fuck with me!

Why would I do this to Senpai?!

「The way a microwave oven works is –」(Makoto)「STOOOP!」(Makoto)

Haah, haah.

It takes me a while to realize that this ragged breathing is my own.

As I touch my forehead, a large amount of sweat flows from it.

I can feel the wet sensation. I can feel that it's cold sweat.

I stop my shallow breaths for now and take a large, deep one.

I exhale slowly.

「A dream, huh.」(Makoto)

This is Asora, my bedroom.

This isn't a battlefield and Senpai isn't here.

It was a dream.

「... It was a dream, right?」(Makoto)

For such a crazy dream it was so strangely vivid that I question myself unconsciously.

Ilumgand is supposed to be dead.

And nobody resembling a black knight has appeared around the hero of Limia or the Hoperaise family.

If we're talking about a knight who protects Senpai, I think there was another one in her party.

One of the kingdom's knights.

I'm not even in the mood to go back to sleep.

I'm completely awake.

Tch, even though dinner with the takoyaki and tako-shabu was a great hit and everyone enjoyed it.

Even Shiki pressed his hands together* in admiration, wondering aloud just how deep the nabe's mysteries are.

TLN*: Like putting your hands together for a prayer/paying respects I laughed at that. Even though I was quite drunk, that was actually pretty funny.

「Haha.」(Makoto)

I let out a small laugh as I remember this enjoyable memory.

It was just a dream, after all.

There's no use worrying about it.

... Oh yeah.

「It's a bit early, but I guess I'll do some bow practice. I want to calm down a bit anyway.」(Makoto) I change my clothes.

I get my bow ready and leave the room.

I head to the archery range that I had built on the grounds.

Until the morning sun rises.

I fire my bow, free from obstructive thoughts.

Chapter 177: Onto the Empire

There's a clear weight felt on my hand.

I am in the Adventurer Guild of Rotsgard.

"This is heavy." (Makoto)

"Your only thoughts are its weight?"

"Even if you say 'only'... the other would be that it is smaller than I originally thought." (Makoto) "The number of hyumans that have seen this can be counted with the fingers of one's hands you know. A rare egg of a superior dragon. A scholar specialized in dragons would kill its own parents to obtain this you know."

I look at the egg that's the size of a rugby ball.

"Ah, now that you mention it..." (Makoto)

"Are you feeling how mystical it is?"

"I thought that Mio might want to give it a taste, so I have to be careful." (Makoto) "..."

The one that is sitting opposite of me with a table in between, is the head of the whole Adventurer Guild.

A handsome boy with androgynous appearance and a mysterious atmosphere; name's Falz. Though that's his fake identity he uses in society.

His real identity is that of the dragon standing on top of all superior dragons; the Illusory Dragon, Root.

A person that created the Adventurer Guild because of his preferences, and a pervert in the truest sense of the word who goes for both sexes. I don't know if it's for hundreds of years or thousands of years, but he is good at feigning innocence.

In other words, a person I don't want to get too close to.

Well, right now he doesn't have his usual poker face he can control at

will. In front of me, he is showing a shocked face, or maybe it is a troubled face, with a smile on it.

“Well, more importantly, I just have to deliver this to Grount-san who is at the territory of the Empire in the Vanilla Desert, right?” (Makoto) “Yeah. If possible I want you to experience the dragon society as well. Beginning from that boy there, Lancer. I do feel sorry for having you do this. Of course, I promise you that I will be giving you a proper reward, including the matter of Kaleneon.” (Root) The expression of Root changes into the usual handsome smile.

The Dragon Slayer adventurer named Sofia Bruga is related to the violence caused towards the superior dragons.

This bisexual dragon easily told me that Sofia possessed the same blood as him, but he didn’t delve deeper into the matter.

He said he would tell me when the time comes, but who knows if that’s true.

The things he told me regarding the request are also not that many.

Currently, the number of superior dragons in good health are only 3; the others have turned into dragon eggs.

The eggs will be entrusted to their dragon brethrens located in various places, and others will be entrusted to believers. They will be told to wait for their eventual return.

And so, I have been given the location of those people and their information, and I have also been asked the delivery of those eggs.

The reward Root has pointed out is not something with form. It is the supply of information that only he knows of, the country that exists inside the territory of the demon race, and things like providing assistance to Kaleneon.

Even if it is an important item, the reward for the delivery of it is quite extraordinary.

“I am looking forward to it. In any case, I was planning on going to

Gritonia, so I can do it while I'm at it." (Makoto) "Fufufu, Princess Lily huh. The invitation was not only from her, but also the intentions of the hero as well. She is not someone that would open her heart to Makoto-kun, but she won't suddenly take you and eat you. Go ahead and tour the Empire while being somewhat cautious.

...Hah... I wanted to go as well" (Root)

"Tour the Empire huh. After that, I am going to Limia Kingdom as well so I don't feel like touring though. Well, I will go have fun." (Makoto) After senpai asked me to contact Prince Joshua, I of course tried to immediately contact him-I mean, her... Ah geez! This is also troublesome!

I will just leave it as Joshua-san.

At the beginning, while I was talking with Joshua-san, it ended up that I will be going to the Kingdom in a near future.

On the other hand, Princess Lily enquired about this and that, and it turned into a mood where I had to go to the Empire.

It is not like I was being played with or coerced into doing anything, but... it kinda didn't feel right.

"Limia Kingdom. Ah, in this side there's Prince Joshua and the hero Hibiki huh. Well well, you have totally become a popular one." (Root) "And you say it with so much fun. Geez." (Makoto)

"I am actually having fun, so it can't be helped. If you need my help, don't hesitate to tell me anytime. Just the simple action of relying on me would make me happy after all." (Root) "When I feel like I need your help, I will be counting on you at that time." (Makoto) "... I will be waiting. Also, leaving aside the Kingdom and Empire, if you plan on going 'further north'..." (Root) Further north.

He is referring to the Demon race huh.

"... What?" (Makoto)

"I have an egg for it, so come to the guild, ok?" (Root)

"I see. Got it." (Makoto)

Now that he mentions it, there's also a delivery point for the demon race territory.

So I will be carrying the eggs of superior dragons while going around greeting the several forces that are in war huh.

From up close, it would look like really suspicious behavior.

I will at least try to be docile in my actions.

... As far as I am able to.

"Your entourage will be Tomoe and Shiki, right? The Empire's hero, Tomoki, is infatuated with Tomoe. Be careful." (Root) "Thanks for the warning." (Makoto)

"If the one going wasn't you, I would also be cautioning about Tomoki's Valkyries, but it seems there's no worries on that part." (Root) Valkyries?

This is the first time I hear of this name.

Aside from the fact that the Empire is researching on guns, I have not gathered much information on them.

Just as Root said, it might be necessary to use this chance to look around.

"Valkyries? What is this about worries?" (Makoto)

"The girls that are entranced with Tomoki-is how you should think of it. What you should be worried about is... well, you don't even yield to me, so I am just saying that there's no worries that you will be falling for any half-assed seduction." (Root) "... Yielding to you, you say." (Makoto)

You are both sexes you know?

The only ones who would accept this when in the know would be people of real valour.

"Even the secretary waiting outside has completely fallen—" (Root) "I have certainly received the eggs. Well then, see ya, pervert Root." (Makoto) "... I feel like you called me in a really rude way, but oh well. See ya later, Makoto-kun." (Root) The morning I depart to the Empire.

It was supposed to be a serious scene where I accept the request of a superior dragon, and yet, I was strangely tired.

Gritonia huh.

It is the first time I visit that country, but I wonder what kind of place it is.

I am actually not that good at dealing with Princess Lily.

It would be nice if it's at least a comfortable place.

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"T-This is impressive snow. The latitude shouldn't be that much different from the Kingdom, so what's with this difference?" (Makoto) I heard that Limia Kingdom is a country with abundant green.

I did hear from rumors and manuscripts that Gritonia Empire is a land of intense cold, but when seeing it in person, it is at a shocking level.

They should be practically lined up left and right according to the map after all.

"Gritonia is a land with many mountains after all. Depending on the place, it is said that the snow can reach several meters." (Shiki) "Experiencing the climate of another country is also one of the enjoyments of travelling." (Tomoe) Even when walking on the Golden Highway, it still looks so different.

At the Golden Highway I saw from Tsige, I only felt as if it was a path that simply stretched far into the distance.

While I was in admiration, Tomoe and Shiki gave their impressions and information about it.

"I wonder how it is further north, at the country of the demon race where there's also a lot of mountains. I can't imagine it." (Makoto) "I would call the place where the demon race lives as an ice field. Of course, it has a lot more snow than here, and the level of wind and cold is remarkably different." (Tomoe) "For hyumans, no, for living beings, it is a harsh environment." (Shiki) The two of them know that place huh.

For living beings...

I feel like I want to visit it, and I also feel like I just want to snuggle in my bedroom.

A while after entering the Empire's territory, the snow immediately increased in thickness, and I learned that the tools to protect us against the cold that we got on Rotsgard were not exaggerated.

While gazing at the features of the snow country, I first head towards a town named Robin.

There was the talk that I would be allowed to use the teleporting formation that leads to the capital, and I was advised to take the teleportation from that town.

It would be quite painful to walk infinitely in this place, so it would be a great help.

"If we weren't walking the Golden Highway, I am confident of ending stranded here." (Makoto) "... I wonder why. Even when I hear the word stranded from Waka, I don't feel a single shred of crisis from it." (Tomoe) "I am sorry but, I feel the same way." (Shiki)

My followers are cruel.

I can hold on without eating for several days, and even when I say cold, aside from the snow, the temperature itself doesn't feel that cold. If I don't know the directions, I can just return to Asora.

...

Eh? The crisis in the word stranded is slowly fading away.

"To-Tomoe! Now that I think about it, I heard you are acquainted with the hero? Didn't you say you didn't like him that much? In that case, it would have been fine to leave it to Shiki alone, or substituting you for Lime was also fine." (Makoto) "At first, I intended to do that, but I had Lime head to Lorel. Hibiki's memories were not on the level of Waka, but it was incredibly interesting, so just in case, that 'thing' in the Empire might also know some interesting things. That time when I discarded him

was a slightly thoughtless play of my part." (Tomoe) "Hmph, well, Tomoki-kun is also a Japanese person, so I think he knows things I don't know of. If you don't want to do it, I will ask Shiki, so tell me without hesitation." (Makoto) ...Eh?

"... Uhm, Waka. It is something trivial, but at that time, wouldn't it have been better for me to tell Tomoe that she can ask me without hesitation?" (Shiki) Ah!!

"Wait a bit, Tomoe." (Makoto)

"What is it?" (Tomoe)

"What was that about Lime being in Lorel?!" (Makoto)

What is she saying all nonchalantly?!

I am glad I didn't let it slip by!

Hm, I feel like Shiki also said something too...

Tte, for now I will leave that for later.

"Well, Hibiki seems to be interested in us. I have already given her a formal warning, but just in case, I had Lime survey her. It is only that. No need to fret." (Tomoe) 'No need to fret', yeah right!

What's that about a warning?!

"A formal warning you say. Just what did you tell her?" (Makoto) "That curiosity killed the cat. That she is free to peek at whatever she wants, but the consequences of it are her own responsibility-ja to. Well, instead of a normal warning, it is more like cautioning. Whether it is the Empire, Kingdom, Kaleneon, or the demon race, it would be a pain to have her sniffing around when we are moving around busily doing all this." (Tomoe) ... Next time I see her, I will tell her sorry for scaring her.

It seems Tomoe is kind of cautious of senpai huh.

I think she was taking the company-no -me into consideration when she did this.

In that case, maybe I am the one that is way too defenseless when with

senpai?

But... she is Japanese and a senpai from the same school. Of course, she wasn't a bad person.

Do I have to be cautious of someone like that too?

It is true that I felt an uncomfortable feeling from senpai. I can't say for sure what it was, but she might not be exactly the same senpai I know of.

It is necessary to doubt her. I kind of don't like that.

An uncomfortable feeling.

When I learn the identity... the reason for it... I will leave the thinking when that time comes.

Yeah.

I have just created a connection with one of the heroes. It is not something I have to urgently inquire about anyways.

Chapter 178: Tomoki Appears

I have been betrayed by the Empire.

A snow country metropolis in a fantasy world.

I was actually really looking forward to the imperial capital's appearance. Wondering what kind of illusory-like land it might be.

Like for example; a steampunk-looking place with steam coming out here and there.

Seriously, there's nothing like that here.

It may be splendid, but well, it gives the impression of a fortress.

If it is like this, the first town I arrived to called Robin gave more of a snowy country than this.

A teleportation facility that can overlook the imperial capital of Ruinas.

There's still one more teleport formation to arrive inside Ruinas, but the guides that followed us from Robin told us to please look at the imperial capital and gave us time here.

From what seems to be a mountainous area of tall mountains, what can be seen from below is a big city.

Even though its circumference is bright white with snow, the inside of the city looks normal like the one of Rotsgard.

There's no snow piled up.

In those points, I think magic is involved.

It is heavily different from what I was expecting...

The imperial capital has a circular shape with three outer walls that demarcate the central and outside circumference.

At the very center there's a castle I can see even from here, so that must be where the emperor is.

It seems like they place social classes to the people living in the imperial capital, so those outer walls are probably the representation of

the difference between the people that live there.

A society reigned by social position huh.

An obvious difference is seen in the standings between hyumans and demons, so it isn't strange to see differences within hyumans.

It might be a good chance to feel it with my own skin at least once.

"What do you think of the imperial capital, Waka?" (Shiki) "I had an image that it would be more like... filled with snow or icy." (Makoto) "Me too. How to say it, it is a city with no elegance." (Tomoe) "That's different from expectation huh. This time it will be a stay of about 2 days. There's not much time to look around, so I am happy that they are showing us its entirety in this way. To investigate the atmosphere of the city, maybe I should leave that job to Shiki?" (Makoto) "Understood. I will look around the state of the city when there's free time." (Shiki) "I'm counting on you. I have to deliver this after all." (Makoto) I look at the bag I am carrying.

It seems to be the egg of Lancer. I have to bring this egg to a superior dragon named Grount.

The one guiding us has already been settled by Root to Princess Lily.

Root, he really does have mysterious connections.

He is a pervert without doubts, but his heartfelt consideration, I honestly appreciate it.

"Oh right, it would be bad to leave the guide waiting too much. Well then, let's go." (Makoto) "Yes."

"Right."

I call Tomoe and Shiki, and confirm that both of them nod.

I wave my hand at the guide that is looking at us from afar and return.

Later, we will be doing a teleportation once more, and then, after receiving several inspections, we will head to the place of the princess. There, we will meet the hero and the princess.

The Empire's hero, Iwahashi Tomoki.

It seems he is 2 years younger than me, but as a hero, he has been playing quite the big role.

I wonder if the crater that can be seen slightly further away from the imperial capital was his doing.

If I am able to ask him about it, let's try asking.

I am half looking forward to it and half uneasy.

While thinking hopefully about the second hero I will be meeting, I step onto the teleport formation.

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"Well then Raidou-sama, please wait in this room here. The two there, I ask you to follow us."

"...Understood. Tomoe, Shiki, see you later." (Makoto)

The two are guided into the castle and disappear into its depths.

Being the only one left now, I open the door and wait. I follow the instructions of the guide that was here moments ago and enter the room at the left side.

It seems to be the norm to have the representative and the other party wait in different places when doing their greetings, and it is not like this is just a custom done only in negotiations.

Even if they isolate me in a business relationship, I have already decided that there will be no other conclusion than demanding to leave, so there's not much point in doing so though.

If not, there would be no point in having Tomoe and Shiki accompanying me.

But I thought that the one isolated would be Tomoe. This is a bit unexpected.

I look at my given room as I wait.

As expected of the castle of a large country and the place where the emperor is in.

Leaving aside mine, this reception room is a lot more extravagant than the one from Zara-san and Rembrandt-san.

It isn't like it is all shiny. There's a calm and settled atmosphere that makes me feel its elegance and extravagance. What I am trying to say is that, I can't calm down.

Drinking the given tea while sinking deeply into the sofa, the part at my lower back feels fluffy.

Hm, the presence of people..

2 of them. Slightly behind, there's 3 more.

5?

That's quite a lot.

Even when there's already 2 standing guard outside the door and a maid-san inside the room that is serving me tea.

Well, it would be better to wait for them standing.

Because I moved, the maid-san lifted her head, and while that happened, the door opens and the 5 enter the room. Seeing them, she does one step back and returns to her original position.

"Glad that you have come, Raidou-dono. You were a great help at Rotsgard.Let me please give you my thanks once again."

Princess Lily was the first one to speak.

From the people here, she is the only familiar face.

"Thank you for inviting me in this occasion, Princess Lily. It's embarrassing to say but, I have personally seen with my own eyes such a big city within this thick snow; witnessing the power of the empire, I thought that maybe we are out-of-place. That I am now able to meet with someone who I knew when in Rotsgard, I am slightly relieved." (Makoto)
"I am happy that you praise our imperial capital. It is sad that it will be a short stay, and here I thought about escorting you and make sure you would have fun. However, when I saw your face, a desire of having you make a store at our country in your return has been borned. Please do

consider it.” (Lily) Eh?

Her atmosphere is softer in its entirety compared to the time I met her in Rotsgard.

Is it because it is her own country?

But I was told that there would be no negotiation, yet, it already feels as if the odds and ends of the words have already deviated from mere casual talk.

More so because her mouth looks gentle, but the depths of her eyes were not smiling.

As I thought, I am no good with her.

And, the one at her side is probably the hero. He is standing right beside the princess, so there’s no mistake, right?

He is supposed to be Japanese, but maybe it is called odd-eye, the color of his eyes are different and the color of his hair is a natural silver.

Did he tamper with his appearance?

Or was he originally a half or a quarter?

I heard that he was two years younger from senpai, but his height is definitely over 180cm. A handsome man that wouldn’t look out of place in this world of hyumans.

I see. This type of people is what that Goddess prefers huh.

“Right. I can’t just be happy about our reunion. Raidou-dono, I will introduce you. The person here is the one providing support to our country, hero Tomoki-sama.” (Lily) As I thought.

“You are the hero-sama huh. Nice to meet you, I am the representative of the Kuzunoha Company, name is Raidou. I am honored to meet you.” (Makoto) “Iwahashi Tomoki.” (Tomoki)

While doing his greeting, he looks at me seriously.

“What is it?” (Makoto)

“Don’t ‘what is it?’ me. You are a Japanese, right? Your face is not that

of a hyuman, and it doesn't seem like you are a demi-human either. Also, you are using an obvious fake name like Raidou." (Tomoki) ...

I was exposed in an instant.

Hah...

Well, it is true that I don't have a nice face. And the name Raidou is also one that can be easily pointed out by people that know of it.

Hm... but is it something that can be instantly pointed out?

Is he quite the gamer?

Senpai didn't react much to the name Raidou after all.

"Ahahaha. Well, a lot happened and I am doing business here." (Makoto) "Your real name is?" (Tomoko)

"To-Tomoki-sama? What is all this about?" (Lily)

After Princess Lily glanced at me, she turns towards Tomoki and asks.

Understanding that Tomoki and I have some sort of connection seems to have shaken her quite a bit.

"This guy, he calls himself Raidou, but he is the same as me, an otherworldler. With his face features, it is practically certain that he is Japanese. In other words, a human from the same country as me." (Tomoki) "The same as Tomoki-sama... A hero?!" (Lily)

"I don't know if he is. I have not heard about a third hero from the Goddess. Also, he is faking his own name and doing business. Hey, you. Please tell me your name." (Tomoki) "Misumi Makoto. I came here when I was in second year of senior high school. That would be two years higher than you, right?" (Makoto) "Why do you know my age?" (Tomoki)

"I heard it from Hibiki-senpai. Before coming here, senpai was in Rotsgard you see." (Makoto) What's with him?

I am telling him that I am older than him, and yet, how long does he intend to speak with me in that manner?

Maybe he is the type that doesn't care about seniority?

“Senpai… then, you were a student from the same Nakatsuhara School as Hibiki?” (Tomoki) Hibiki?!

He is even calling senpai without honorifics?!

Incredible. There’s an existence here that I can’t understand at all.

I want to say a few words about that usage of words of his, but the princess is here as well, and there’s also the three behind that are probably acquaintances of the hero or his companions.

I feel like it might be a bit bad to say this here.

“Yeah, that would be the case.” (Makoto)

“… Hmph. That’s not really interesting.” (Tomoki)

Hah?!

Leaving aside what he was implying, is that something you should be saying aloud?!

What do you mean by not interesting?!

“Uhm, Tomoki-sama. This occasion is only for greetings, so after introducing the others, we can leave other matters for later.” (Lily) Maybe the princess felt like my conversation with Tomoki-kun would take long, so she cut into the talk.

But well, this Tomoki-kun was the type of junior that would go thinking that he can just go talking to anyone equivalently?

Hmph.

Perhaps I am the old fashioned one for being concerned about ages here.

For me, it was natural to use formal speech when it is towards someone even if it was only a one year difference though.

It was that way in the archery club.

“No, Lily. If he is Japanese, please let me speak with him for a little longer. I think that this way will be faster.” (Tomoki) “…But that is… this person is a guest that I invited, and there’s also the point that he was

called here for another matter." (Lily) "Sorry, please leave that for later. Two of his subordinates have come with him, so it should be fine to leave them a verbal message." (Tomoki) Hey hey!

That's not something for you to decide.

What's with this boy that's acting all high-and-mighty?

What Princess Lily is talking about regarding that other matter is the guiding to the place of Grount and the permission to use the teleport formation, so it is something that is directly related to me though?!

Ah, geez.

Since this is happening, should I take this opportunity to give him a sermon?

"... Raidou-dono." (Lily)

"Yes?" (Makoto)

The princess called me Raidou.

She didn't call me Makoto or Misumi.

"It is about the matter that Falz-dono has entrusted you with. Is it one of those two that are actually going? I am thinking about going myself to tell them the particulars though." (Lily) ...Eh...

Is this supposed to be the point where the princess yields?

The maids at the surroundings and the three at the back seem to be affected by the charm power of Tomoki-kun. The atmosphere around them is pinkish and doesn't feel like there will be any point in trying to speak with them. The only one I could rely on was the princess who seems like she is not under his control, and yet...

Anyways, the charm power gives a more displeasing feeling than I expected.

It feels like being inside an elevator with a bunch of people that have thick perfume.

"Ah... about that, I was planning on going myself, so I will be the one

doing the speaking." (Makoto) "... Raidou-dono will? I am sorry but, the domain of Grount is not a place where ordinary methods... ah, right. Since you are from another world like Tomoki-sama, it might not be that impossible. Understood. We will be leaving our seats for a while then." (Lily) "Lily, if you are going to be leaving, do so yourself please. I want the other girls to be here." (Tomoki) "Well then, I will be leaving for a bit. I also have something to speak with your companions, so I will be heading there." (Lily) "Got it." (Tomoki)

"Ah, okay?." (Makoto)

Uwaaa, the princess really left.

Tomoki-kun, how much authority do you have by being the hero of the Empire?

Is a hero such an absolute existence?

"Now then." (Tomoki)

Tomoki-kun tosses himself grandly onto the sofa opposite of me and sat in a relaxed posture.

Just as he said, the three girls that are wearing the same dress design as the maids were still inside the room.

The three at the back of Tomoki-kun had a specially dazed expression.

Everyone is sexy, but just like what I said before, because of the charm power, it felt like something was stuck in my nose and it was nauseating.

"I didn't think I would encounter a Japanese male. Ah, take a sit." (Tomoki) "....." (Makoto)

Being urged on, I sit.

How to say this; is he like this with anyone?

"Now then, let's open our chests and speak to our heart's content. For the time being, there's something I definitely have to firmly request from you guys in this occasion. Is it okay to say this first?" (Tomoki) "Fine but, I am two years older than you, Tomoki-kun. Don't you use formal speech with your senpais?" (Makoto) "Hah? Why would I do that for a stranger

just because he was born earlier? I am the type of person that feels like changing one's behavior depending on the person are the ones who are rude." (Tomoki) Being born earlier, and the fact that I am a stranger.... For me, this is plenty reason to be using formal speech though.

Hibiki-senpai, if you knew he was this kind of person, please tell me beforehand.

If you had done that, I would have been able to come here with my expectations low.

...Probably.

"..... I see." (Makoto)

"In the first place, if you are talking about being formal, you who are a mere merchant should be the one being formal since I am the hero. You who changed your behavior because we are the same Japanese and have an age difference, shouldn't be speaking about others, right? Our social standpoints hold precedence over seniority after all." (Tomoki) "..."

..... Is this guy serious?

I see. I can kind of understand why Tomoe hates him.

Leaving aside every single word he says, I can tell that he is trying to interpret everything in a way that fits him better.

Not only double standards, he feels like the type that would easily place triple to quadruple standards.

"Well, I won't pursue that topic anymore. Let's talk at ease. And then, ah right, about the request I had of you guys." (Tomoki) Eh? It was made as if I was the one in the wrong.

What's with this flow?

There's 4 people aside from me, and yet, it is strange that not a single one is saying anything.

"... Let's hear it." (Makoto)

I somehow collect myself and say only that.

“Give me Tomoe.” (Tomoki)

Ah?

What is this idiot saying?

For only these few words, there was a need of a rather lengthy silence.

Because my head had gone completely blank.

I was seriously about to forget about everything that happened before it.

So it is really possible to blow away one’s thoughts.

“Hah?” (Makoto)

By the time I asked again, quite a lot of time had passed.

Chapter 179: Negotiation Breakdown

“Of course, it won’t be for free.” (Tomoki)

“…”

Give him Tomoe?

This guy certainly did say that.

It seems he is using his charm power and living a smooth life, but he is like a kid asking for a toy.

He really wants Tomoe who he was unable to obtain with his demonic eyes, and is now telling me to give her to him.

Is that what this is all about?

“The girls here are the daughters of nobles from the Empire. But they had some talent in battle, so I trained them.” (Tomoki) “…”

I did lose my speech after that stupid utterance, but right now I am probably composed.

With the signal of that guy, Tomoki, the three girls that were at his back moved to both of my sides and my back.

“The level of those three are over 400. Their face and style, well, it is as you see. They are quite popular, you know? Well, compared to Japan, anyone in this world is good looking though. Hahaha!” (Tomoki) “…”

The two at my sides are around my age.

A beautiful type and the other is a cute type. The last one that is at my back slightly bend and placing her hand towards my chin, seems to be older.

Did Princess Lily tell him my preferences, or is it just that this is simply his own hobby? I really don’t know.

The cute one is taking my hand and carrying it towards her breasts.

What a straight seduction.

Well, something like this… doesn’t matter at all.

“Lily has told me about Tomoe’s level. Even if we add numbers here, it wouldn’t be enough. If you want to, I can bring more. Later, I will guide you to where my harem is, so you can choose a number of them and take them with you.” (Tomoki) “...”

Just how much of a joke is this guy.

No matter the details, they are supposed to be girls that yearn for him.

And also, Tomoe is practically family. An important existence.

I don’t have a single shred of intention to give her to someone who is trying to get her as if trading objects.

“Staying silent? Ah, you must be nervous.I can understand. You, don’t have experience right? Don’t worry. These girls will properly instruct you. At first, it is okay to just leave it in their hands. If I order it, they will go to whoever’s place, and they will obey anyone. I said this before, but these girls can fight at a level higher than standards. I promise you that I will properly tell them to devote themselves to you when I give them over.” (Tomoki) “...”

Control them with charm, finish their training, and use them for battle.

When Root mentioned the Valkyries, he was referring to these girls huh. Or maybe, everyone in Tomoki’s harem are referred as Valkyries?

Whichever it is, his attitude feels like he is quite familiar with this type of situations.

Being Japanese, using people as object, and a high schooler before coming to this world; a person like that, how dare he act this naturally.

Are you telling me that he has already completely forgotten about Japan?

Is it really weird for me to cling onto it all this time?

“Hey, say something. What you wish! How many women do you want? Gold, land, rights for business; those things are fine too. What are you being all silent for?” (Tomoki) I breathe in deeply.

Now then.

"...I refuse" (Makoto)

"Ah?" (Tomoki)

He asks me again.

In no way did I say this in a low voice.

He heard me, yet he still asked.

He is trying to coerce me.

Compared to Zara-san, this is a flimsy attempt.

"I said I refuse. For me and also for the company, Tomoe is not someone that can be replaced. Give it up." (Makoto) "... Are you seriously saying this?" (Tomoki)

"Give up. I won't give you Tomoe. That is my wish." (Makoto) I clearly tell him this.

He was blatantly trying to coerce me and trying to shut me up with his presence.

"... You, you haven't received any significant power from the Goddess, right? You are not that strong either. Tomoe and that other guy are quite strong, but they are not here right now. Lily has gone to deal with them after all." (Tomoki) "And?" (Makoto)

"I have a relative understanding of your abilities. You can't beat me. Can't you nod until being beaten by force? Are you stupid? This place is also perfectly soundproof, you know." (Tomoki) "...If you don't even intend to call me properly, there wasn't much point in giving you my name. How can you properly gauge my power when this our first time meeting? Are heroes specialized in bluffs? Are you the type that is all bark and no bite?" (Makoto) Can't get a hint huh.

Even senpai was unable to notice much of my power, so I don't think this thing can notice it.

Even if he is really the one that created that crater, that level of threat is no danger at all.

I already know that Tomoki is using some sort of tool to gauge my power.

In a sense, he is acting big out of a basis.

“You... it seems like you don’t properly understand the situation you are in right now.” (Tomoki) Instantly after those words of Tomoki, blades were placed at my neck, heart, and wrists.

No need to say, this is the work of those girls.

Just that, they are not directly hitting me.

Even if it’s thin, these girls don’t have enough power to cut through my magic power armor after all. That’s why, it is natural that I don’t need to be on guard.

But a smile appears in Tomoki’s face.

“With this, are you still able to keep using that contempting mouth of yours, Raidou-dono?” (Tomoki) “...”

A man that completely gets on my nerves.

He is more annoying than most hyumans.

“I can somewhat tell the power of others. The method is business secret though. You don’t have the power to defeat a single one of those girls. And, the reason why you are able to have Tomoe obey you despite that...” (Tomoki) “...”

“Must be because you have a strong taming power. You must be able to control strong mamonos and dragons with that power of yours.” (Tomoki) ... Totally wrong.

I don’t know how he reached that conclusion, but there’s a lot of questionable points.

Most of all, I am grateful that he has brought out blades to coerce me.

He is the one that began.

That will clear my conscience slightly.

I will just have Tomoe search for Grount’s location and quickly finish

my task.

I don't want to stay long in this country.

No, if possible, I don't want to come here anymore.

"Well well, I didn't expect to be seen through. It seems heroes are existences I can't underestimate." (Makoto) While saying things I don't really mean, I strengthen the soundproof barrier that was already present.

Harden the walls, and place a lock on the door as well.

Done.

"That's why, if you turn over Tomoe to me, she will have to obey me. Right?" (Tomoki) "I see, I see." (Makoto)

Ignoring the three girls that have blades on my body, I place strength in my legs.

"Hey, you—?!" (Tomoki)

A high-pitched sound and a short scream of a girl, cut off the words of Tomoki.

One of the blades falls onto the table in between me and Tomoki and makes a sound. The women that were trying to restrain me lift their voices at me who is standing without caring about it.

I look down on Tomoki who is still sitting.

"To try obtaining Tomoe when you have only piled up this level of women, it seems that you have really looked down on my follower." (Makoto) "This is the center of the Empire. Do you understand just how disadvantageous it would be for you to get in trouble with me?" (Tomoki) Without caring about my gaze, Tomoki actually rested his back and looks back at me.

And then...

"Yeah, I understand." (Makoto)

"What?" (Tomoki)

"I will have to do my best to hush it up." (Makoto)

“Fuh, stop the bluffing. A single merchant like you can get the patronage of a large country like Gritonia, moreover, the number of talents you own will increase, you know? Think about this properly, merchant. You might be the owner of a slightly big company, but don’t go getting heated up over a negotiation.” (Tomoki) “Sorry to say but, even if I am called the representative, I am more of a decoration. To the point that the title is too much for me. If you were looking for such composure from me, your calculations were wrong. My place is a bit special you see. If I don’t punch you right now, I will probably make Tomoe angry later. Well, even without that, I would still do it though.” (Makoto) It seems Tomoki has noticed my change in presence.

“Girls, that guy—!!” (Tomoki)

He tries to gives orders to the three girls that had taken a bit of distance from me…

But it’s too late.

“Sleep.” (Makoto)

Sealing the movements of the girls around by stretching the hands of the magic power armor, I used a direct sleeping spell.

As if acting in concert to my words, their bodies fall onto the rug.

While at it, I also made the maid sleep as well.

“!! ga”

Kicking the table, I create a path.

Advancing just as is, I grab his temples.

The resistance of the sitted Tomoki was weak, to the point that it makes me doubt the power of a hero.

Is he the type that gets stronger depending on prerequisites?

Even so, I won’t change what I will be doing.

It is his fault for being unable to show his true strength unless those moments occur.

I smash his face onto the floor.

I lift my leg to the back, and just like that, I kick his head.

The hero flies with quite the momentum and hits the walls. But, there wasn't much change in the situation outside.

It seems like the effect of the soundproof and the hardening is showing good results.

I unhurriedly close the distance.

"Hn"

I stop my feet.

Something comes flying from Tomoki.

It's not a spell. A tool, weapon.

A kind of throwing knife; three of them.

It doesn't seem like normal knifes, but I don't mind them.

I once again walk, and receive the thrown blades with the magic power armor. The moment the knives make contact, they shine brightly, and explode.

And what of it.

Without minding about it, I close the distance, and this time, the glaring Tomoki shoots a spell at me.

When I thought something shone, it hit the magic power armor.

It is fast, but powerless.

If you want to make me flinch, you will have to show firepower on the level of Sofia.

Receiving all the attacks that don't even need to be evaded, I lift Tomoki's body with the magic power armor.

His hate-filled eyes had not changed even now.

Hmph.

You treated Tomoe as an object.

You must be properly prepared for the result of your actions, right?

At Tomoki who had his face and body equally pressed onto the wall, I mindlessly punched him to a point that I had stopped counting the number of times in the middle of it.

I ignored anything he said. No matter what he did, I blocked it. Because I thought that this way would be more effective.

When I aimed for his face every time he opened his mouth, in time, he shut it.

I thought that I would be refreshed while punching him, but it didn't happen.

Aside from the first punch, the ones that followed didn't serve as a refresher.

I have to make it so he doesn't think about putting his hands on Tomoe ever again. With that reason alone, I continued inflicting pain.

In time, I let off Tomoki who has lost his ability to speak coherent words.

"It's great that I am weak, right? Because you are let off with only this much." (Makoto) That image of him curling his body and holding his head with both hands... made me imagine something.

"... So this time you are the one staying silent huh, Tomoki. Hey, aren't you a hero? How about being a little bit more dignified even when being beaten? That look of yours, it is comical how you look like a bullied person." (Makoto) It looked like Tomoki reacted to the word bullied, but... there's no point in digging deeper into it.

I grab Tomoki with my own hands.

I shrink down the magic power armor, and in exchange, I use [Sakai] to heal the wounds of Tomoki.

The healing proceeds quite quickly.

Because the concealing ability of the magic power armor was released, the light of magic power leaks out to my surroundings.

If Tomoki were to gauge me when I'm in this state, he might actually not have gone for a forceful method.

He doesn't look like the type that picks a fight with the strong after all.

Whether it is senpai or Tomoki, their power is not that big of a deal.

No, frankly speaking, the war itself is not a threat for Kuzunoha Company or Asora. That's why, whether it is Tomoe or Shiki, they probably won't say much to me about this.

Because no matter what happens, the difference would be like using my left leg instead of my right to kick a small pebble.

It is 'troublesome', so it is a war I don't want to get involved with though.

The external wounds finish erasing. The healing is done huh.

I drag Tomoki, who is taller than me, towards the sofa he was in, and throw him there.

I return [Sakai] to concealment, and return the kicked table to its original place.

I slap the cheeks of the spaced-out Tomoki to return him to his senses.

…

Tomoki looks at me with conscious eyes.

Just that, those eyes weren't filled with strong will or haughtiness, and there was clear weakness and fear mixed in it.

"I properly healed you, so there should be no impediments in your war with the demon race." (Makoto) I look at his eyes and tell him with a smile that he has been healed.

"Well then, I will be leaving now. I have another business here in the Empire you see. I am kind of…busy. Of course, it is not as important as being a hero though." (Makoto) While speaking, I line up the three girls

and maid that I forgot about, and have them sit on the sofa I was in.

I pass at his side and head to the door.

“Ah, also...” (Makoto)

I release the lock from the door and the hardening of the walls.

And then, I place my hand on the knob and tell him something important with my back still facing him.

“Don’t wish for Tomoe... no, for anything and anyone of Kuzunoha, ever again. Next time, whether it is intentional or an accident, I will not forgive it. I don’t care about you using your charm power in whichever way you want, but that’s only if it doesn’t involve us. Don’t forget that.” (Makoto) Right.

If he tries something, I won’t be merciful.

To the princess, and the other countries; it is because I didn’t clearly say this that something as stupid as this has occurred.

As expected, maybe the main problem is that I look like I am easy to deal with. That’s making Kuzunoha Company like a tasty chance.

That’s why every place wants to try and put their hands on it.

I should properly tell the other party that I don’t plan on yielding.

The friction that this will create, I will just consider it as a necessary price.

Yeah.

If in the future there’s a weird haggle demanded from me, I wouldn’t be able to take it.

The presents of Susanoo-sama and the others has not been made clear either, and I also have the errand of Root. There’s also the audience with Limia and the Demon Lord.

Now that I think about it... teaching Tomoki here about this might have been a plus in a sense.

There was a slight good in coming to the Empire.

Leaving onto the hall, I tell the knight-looking people that the talk is over, and tell them that I want to return to where Tomoe and Shiki are.

I thought that they would bring someone to guide me, but it was the knight-san himself that took the guiding role.

It would be nice if Tomoe and Shiki didn't go on a rampage as well.

...If it's those two, there's no need to worry huh.

Hah...

Looking at my opening and closing hands while facing the sky, I make a sigh that's definitely not from regret.

It's because I have flung crude violence.

Chapter 180: White Desert

The surface of the spread out ground is bright white.

This is...just beautiful.

Incredible.

At my field of vision there's only white and blue. The white of the ground and the blue of the sky.

"Hah..." (Makoto)

I let out a long sigh.

"Raidou-dono, did you like it? Our Empire's unexplored region, the White Sand Sea."

Hearing the voice from my back, I remember that I didn't come here alone.

That's how much I was moved and surprised.

"... It is a splendid scenery. I am truly moved." (Makoto) "A splendid scenery, is it. I see. It may be a merchant-like impression."

"What do you mean by merchant-like?" (Makoto)

"Pardon me. Merchant-like was a slightly incorrect word to use. I just thought that this is not an impression a fighter would give. That's how I felt, that's all. The desert is not a gentle place for the people entering it after all."

From Gritonia Empire's capital Ruinas to here, we only used one teleport formation.

This female knight says it is an unexplored region, but there isn't that much distance from a hyuman settlement.

It is a place that is shut out by a mountain range at the east of Ruinas, and it is practically neighboring it.

The Empire is completely under control of it. Entrance is restricted.

In that sense, it is correct to say that it is an unexplored region.

“A white desert. Well, I have seen something nice. I have to be grateful of that pervert<Root>.” (Makoto) “What’s most important is that you like it. This is a place that not even the Empire related people dare to get close to. The entrance is being strictly managed, and originally, even if you were a guest of Lily-sama, it would still be impossible to have you come here. Please do understand the solicitude Lily-sama and Tomoki-sama have for you.”

It seems she didn’t hear the last part, since I said it in a low voice.

Tomoki huh.

Yesterday, after having the hero Tomoki face a little pain, I reunited with Tomoe and Shiki, and finished my talk with Princess Lily.

It seems the destination of the Root’s errand is at a place called White Desert in the Gritonia Empire. That’s where the superior dragon Grount is supposed to be. It is a dragon that is somewhat connected with the Empire, and it is certainly true that this is an errand done just because I had the chance.

I did hear from Root that he would be getting the permission, but I didn’t think Princess Lily was involved in it as well.

Well, it is not like every request is going to pass through. This place seems to be important for the Empire, and it has ended in me going with a guide that the Empire prepared.

When I heard the talk about a guide, for a second I thought it would be Tomoki and I frowned.

That was a relief.

My guide is a direct subordinate of Princess Lily called Ginebia-san. It seems she is also Princess Lily’s bodyguard.

She is young and still a royal guard, so she must be quite talented. Just that she is a part of Tomoki’s party, and is filled to the brim with the charm power though.

They gave me a guide that is the bodyguard of Princess Lily and a

member of the hero party.

This is something Ginebia-san said, this must be the will of Princess Lily, and also a way to keep me in check. Tomoe and Shiki told me this.

A royal guard and one of the most prominent knights.

But there's a title placed on her. Royal guard Grount.

The strongest knight that has received the blessing of the superior dragon Grount.

According to Tomoe, in terms of protection, it is prominent even in the world. Also, if she is able to obtain location advantage, Tomoe said that she could stop an army of thousands.

It is impressive since she was able to make Tomoe say that much about her.

After that she said: "Well, it would take me around 3 minutes to beat her. Just about right for a warm-up." Which completely ruined the whole image. She is still in her twenties, so being able to climb that high is worth of praise.

What's important is the point that after Ginebia-san obtained the job of royal guard and became the direct knight of the princess, it lead to taking the trial of Grount and receiving the blessing.

She has the power to travel solo in this white sea of sand and meet Grount.

The princess must have judged that this knight would be able to chase after me no matter where I go.

"Superior dragon Grount. His alias of Sand Sea might come from this place." (Makoto) "Raidou-dono, I am sorry for the rudeness but..." (Ginebia) "Ginebia-dono, of course I am deeply grateful for the princess and Tomoki-sama." (Makoto) "It is okay if that's the case. The previous statement was from my own volition, so please do keep it a secret from the two." (Ginebia) "Yes, I understand. By the way... Ginebia-dono, I heard that you passed the trial and met with Grount, but which direction is this

dragon's dwelling?" (Makoto) While facing Ginebia-san, I grab a fistful of sand with my left hand.

The pure white sand smoothly spills from my hand. The feel of it is also impressive.

"... I also got lost for several days with no idea of the direction. It was only a miracle. But this is something that Grount tells the people that wish for their blessing. It's also engraved on the gate, but it is to: 'Go straight without wavering'. Of course, I also followed those words." (Ginebia) As you go by, there's only sand in sight.

Going straight isn't as easy as it sounds. And I don't want to stay here for several days.

I am planning on returning tomorrow after all.

For now, I will try going straight and see. When I separate from Ginebia-san, I can use [Sakai] to search for the location of the dragon.

"Go straight without wavering huh. Thanks for the info." (Makoto) "Raidou-dono, let me tell you this. From here onwards, there's no guarantee of your life as this is a dangerous desert. Mamonos will appear as well. It seems you are carrying some sort of luggage, but trying to challenge the desert with only that is akin to suicide. If you want to go, I recommend coming at another time..." (Ginebia) "Ah, I will be returning by today, so Ginebia-dono, please wait at the cabin of the teleport formation. Thanks for guiding me." (Makoto) I shift the bag where the egg is in.

When I checked this morning, I caught Tomoe, Mio, and Shiki messing with it by scribbling on it.

Is it a cast of a hospitalized patient? Is what I thought.

... Well, what's important is the inside, so no matter what's written on it, I think there won't be any problem though.

It is the egg of Lancer, so it can't be helped.

For me, he is already dead, so I am able to clear my conscience by

treating it as a new life. But Tomoe and Mio who were unable to deal with him themselves, were especially eager to do something to him.

In a sense, it is proof that they treasure me, so well, I ended up letting them off.

“Wa?! Raidou-dono!! The White Sand Sea is supervised by Grount, and there’s sand and fire traps in many places! Please return!!” (Ginebia) Ignoring the words of Ginebia-san, I change the color of my coat after a long time of not doing it.

Acceleration equipment~.

Errand, here I go~.

“Well then, I wonder where he is.” (Makoto)

I kick the ground.

The feeling of accelerating at once is pleasant.

When I look at my back for an instant, there was a cloud of white sand scattered at my back. Because of that, I can’t see Ginebia-san.

“Wah?! Just how much movement speed do you have?!” (Ginebia) I land.

I could hear the voice of Ginebia from afar. At this rate, I can easily lose her.

While carefreely pondering, I change [Sakai] into search and increase its range.

This place is really big.

“Oh.” (Makoto)

My feet were sinking into the sand in an unnatural way. The sand at my surrounding is also pushing me down at an incredible rate. Soon, the sand had become like a mortar, dragging me to the center of a space of sand.

Is this like, a classic?

I thought that maybe it is an ant hell or the pattern where the center is hollowed. When I checked at the center, there were sharp edges resembling those of a beetle waiting for me there.

“An ant hell huh.” (Makoto)

“Raidou-dono!!! That place is the den of a Mamono that drags their prey with sand. I was too late!! I will be going right—- Eh?!!” (Ginebia) “Heave-ho!!” (Makoto)

I grab that beetle-like thing with both hands and just like that, I use brute force to lift it.

Oh, it is truly an ant hell.

Its buttock is pretty grotesque.

Sorry butt, I am looking for a different game so... at a direction where Ginebia-san isn’t and a place where I won’t be going... I throw it.

Next time I should just jump out of it and escape.

I once again jump and land. Repeating that process of jumping and landing, I use the search [Sakai] and wait until it catches the presence of something that might be the one of Grount.

It didn’t take long.

I found what’s most likely the place.

“It really was straight head. Is it a dragon that doesn’t tell lies?” (Makoto) A divided desert, storms of sand, a burning sand river(the fire’s also white).

I coated myself with the magic armor and while advancing straight into it, I was unable to feel the presence of Ginebia anymore. <Changed magic power armor to magic armor cause it is a mouthful> When I was at a distance to confirm with my eyes the point that [Sakai] had detected, I caught sight of it.

“At the end there’s a white cone? Is that wind swirling at high speed? I am impressed that Ginebia-san was able to pass through this.” (Makoto) I am beginning to get hungry, so let’s quickly deliver this egg.

I advance until it is right at my nose.

“It is going at quite the speed. I thought it was a reversed tornado

version, but it seems to be something even more fiendish. It is completely white and I can't even see the inside. If someone tries to pass with normal means, he would end up as minced meat." (Makoto) While saying that, I take one step forward.

"Pardon the intrusion." (Makoto)

I put the arms of the magic armor inside.

Forcibly tearing up the conic sand and the spell that composes it, I enter inside.

◇◆◇◆◇◆◇◆

"What's this?"

I experienced something that I have never felt before.

In my long thousands years of life, this is something I have never experienced before.

This sea of white sand is being called names like 'Sand Wave' and 'Dragon's Trial'.

That's me.

Superior Dragon, Grount.

Earth and fire resides in this body of mine, but for a long while, I haven't used this power to fight with any enemies.

While giving blessings to the strong ones that cross this sand sea, I have been watching over the world's natural course for a long time with the help of the spirits.

The latter is actually the work of Root, but he is our chief, and has also created the Adventurer Guild and living within hyuman society.

This work that should have just been temporarily changed, by the time I noticed, it had become my livelihood.

Ah, right now is not the time to be rambling like this.

There's someone that is traversing this sand sea at a frightening speed.

The one's who passed the gate are: the knight, who I gave a blessing before; and that other person.

But even if he were to receive the advice of the knight in advance, I don't understand how he was able to arrive here in less than an hour.

He easily evaded the Mamonos of the desert, moreover, he didn't kill a single one of them.

He plunged into all the traps that I set up and has broke through them.

His speed didn't drop, so he is probably unscathed.

Until now, the fastest record has been 3 days. If made into hours, it would be around 72 hours.

It is someone that would easily break the notion of records.

But you know... 1 hour is way too crazy.

From the gate till here, it would be around 70 km.

His speed is at 70km per hour while evading all the mamonos and traps, and traversing through the desert with no signs?

I-I feel like my head will explode.

Don't joke around.

To meet someone like that, I would feel bad for all the previous challengers.

Okay, in that case... I used a spell formation with all my power and rolled up a massive amount of sand, heated it up to a high temperature, and had it swirl conically.

It is a barrier that would turn anyone into minces no matter their defense.

I will have you receive at least this much maliciousness.

... Well, it would be unfair as a trial to make it too severe, so I made it possible to cancel.

With this, he will learn a bit about the harshness of the trial.

Whether it is a hyuman or demihuman, they utilize their given powers too readily. <Probably refers to using their powers without thinking of the consequences.> And yet, they think that they are worthy of that power.

I thought that the system Root created about levels in the adventurer guild was also dangerous.

Power should be something that one obtains after passing through a trial that fits it.

Giving my blessing to two persons in the present time, I didn't think this would happen. I need to have him know of this, or my reputation will cry.

"Well, I can't deny that I am looking forward to seeing the face of that person."

That mutter was my last moment of composure.

"?!!!!"

Something pierced through the barrier I created.

"Impossible... An arm? A cluster of magic power. Is he trying break the barrier by brute force with that thing?!"

A whole different level of magic power.

When it touched the barrier, I was able to tell its characteristics.

It is a hyuman.

But outside his body, there's something crazy made of magic power that seemed as if it were made by gathering the magic power of all the people in the world.

The two arms of that cluster of magic power had thrusted inside the barrier.

My common sense was crumbling at this very moment.

Surpassing the magic power amount of a dragon in the body of a hyuman. Even in the Lorel priestesses, this is something that rarely happens.

As expected, having it break in this way will hurt my dragon pride.

I place even more power into the barrier.

The shadow of a person that was slowly advancing, stopped its feet.

“Eh?”

The voice of a male.

From where I am, I am able to pick up his voice, but it seems from his side, he still hasn’t grasped my presence.

He must have noticed that the density of the barrier increased.

He is able to bring out such a mass of magic power and stabilize it. He should be able to do this much.

But...

“...The pierced place doesn’t return to its original state. The power...is increasing further?! This is, just what in the world am I witnessing?” (Grount) “As expected of the last trap. It will be a bother when going back, so let’s tear it off.”

Muttering this nonchalantly, the man that is wearing a red blazing coat controlled the magic power arms that were piercing through and spread the area in one breath.

As the master of the spell, I can tell how the composition of the spell is slowly breaking into pieces.

Sand spinning at high speed and in high temperature. It didn’t serve as an obstacle at all.

This is...different.

This isn’t the strength of a person taking the trial.

There’s no such challenger.

Could it be, the invasion of a person that is coming here to subjugate me after all this time?

Since the time Gritonia Empire was made, that hasn’t happened once

though.

Was the blessed Ginebia threatened into guiding him?

There's the possibility.

Even if it's her, she wouldn't be able to stop a person like that.

No.

I don't think anyone in the Empire can stop him.

"..."

I look at the dispersed barrier with strained eyes.

I waited inside my den which I made wide and sleep in.

Now that it has come to this, I have no choice but to meet him myself.

That is also a part of a superior dragon's pride.

He soon appeared.

His equipment was so light to the point that it was surprising.

The only thing he had was a bag that seemed to be his luggage. There's no weapons on his self. His red coat seems to be an armor though.

He didn't prepare anything to travel through the desert.

The presence of a hyuman.

It is certainly the presence of a hyuman, but it is heavily different from the one I know.

Thoroughly different.

"Y-You are the superior dragon Grount?"

"... That's right. Do you wish for my blessing?" (Grount) "Blessing? No. I just came because of an errand. Grount-san, you are Root's Oba-san<aunt>, right?" (Makoto) "Root?! Oba-san?!" (Grount)

Root's acquaintance?!

No, more importantly! Oba-san he says?!

"Uhm, there's something Root entrusted me with. He said: 'it would be

best to leave it under the care of an Oba-san, so I am counting on you'."

"... You said it twice..." (Grount)

"Hah?"

Yeah. There's no need to confirm it.

He said it twice.

This boy, he certainly said it twice.

"If you are an acquaintance of Root, you should at least know that I am not related to her<Referring to Root>, right? In the first place, why do you think that being a superior dragon makes us relatives? It is strange when you think about it, right? If you think about the structure! And yet, you said it twice." (Grount) "Eh? Eh?"

Even Root only says it once.

And she apologizes after doing so.

"I see. You don't have any intention to apologize, right?" (Grount) "Ah, sorry! Frankly speaking, I don't know much about the manners between dragons. Root only told me to bring this to you, that's all! If there was any discourtesy in my words..."

If there was any discourtesy, he says.

In other words, he doesn't understand what was the discourtesy.

Guilty.

This is not on the level of whether he is an enemy or not.

Let me teach you the proper way of treating an older lady!!

Root is also guilty.

She send such a strange hyuman in.

She should faint from the agony of the increased work she will get if I am killed by this person!

I was thinking about being young again, so this is convenient.

Normally, I had someone who I have blessed to assist me in my suicide,

but with this, it will save me the trouble.

I don't care anymore.

In any case, I am angry now.

I am angry!!

"Then, I will teach you the etiquette of dragons. Stand upright." (Grount) "Upright? Eh? U-Uwaa!!"

I let out a roar at the boy that doesn't seem to understand the situation.

Most of the hyumans won't be able to move with this, but as expected, it didn't work on him.

As if being pushed, I head to the exit of my shrine.

A drying breath that snatches away the water, a burning breath that reaches the bone, and the strongest scales prided by the peak of dragons, making it possible to take every attack with my own body.

I will welcome you with my most difficult trial.

Under the sunlight that mercilessly shines down, I confronted him.

◇◆◇◆◇◆◇◆

"By the way Tomoe-dono, was it really okay to have Waka-sama go by himself?"

"You are referring to Grount, right? In that case, there's no problem. That person, even if she is a dragon, she has a quiet personality and doesn't like fighting. Waka is also pretty polite towards strangers-ja. He will probably not say the prohibited word."

A male and female pair were walking together in the streets of the Empire.

The man was slightly worried, but the woman didn't seem to be worried at all.

Tomoe and Shiki.

Accompanying Raidou, they had come to the Empire. His followers.

“It is okay if that’s the case though.” (Shiki)

“That doesn’t matter. Waka will probably be returning by evening after all. So let’s continue our survey, Shiki.” (Tomoe) “Tomoe-dono, it seems like you have been in good mood since yesterday.” (Shiki) Shiki speaks to Tomoe who was visibly high in spirit.

“Hmph, you can tell huh. It’s just that Waka did something slightly pleasant-ja yo.” (Tomoe) “Waka-sama did? Is it when he spoke to the hero yesterday?” (Shiki) “Yeah, at that time-ja.” (Tomoe)

“Gritonia’s hero, Iwahashi Tomoki. Seeing this Empire that has been spread with the charm disease, leaving aside his ability, it looks like there’s a problem with his character.” (Shiki) “That part, Waka gave him a good scolding-ja na. Scolding.” (Tomoe) “The details... he didn’t voice it out, right?” (Shiki)

“I was able to guess it. Really, nice job.” (Tomoe)

“Is that so. Then Tomoe-dono, from now on...” (Shiki)

“Umu, Waka also spoke about the atmosphere of the Empire but, you understand, right?” (Tomoe) The eyes of Tomoe narrowed slowly.

“Of course. The situation of the gun development, the details of the hero’s achievements in war. In the remaining time, let’s go collect information.” (Shiki) Shiki crooks his mouth into a smile.

“Then we will divide. First of all, let’s lose the people shadowing us. The appointed time and place, Shiki, don’t get them wrong.” (Tomoe) “To tell you the truth, I am slightly interested in the food of the Empire. But I won’t be late.” (Shiki) “I don’t think it would rival Asora though.” (Tomoe)

“Even so, it might help bring out some new ideas. That’s how I think.” (Shiki) “Well then.” (Tomoe)

“We will meet later.” (Shiki)

With one blink, the figure of those two disappeared from the sight of the people that were silently watching from the shadows.

Chapter 181: Devised Decision, the Desert's Dream

"Next time, I am looking forward to the discussion on setting up a stall."

"I will think about it. I do consider Lily-sama as an important customer after all. Today I don't see the hero-sama though. Well with this, I will be taking my leave. Thank you for inviting me."

"I will believe in those words." (Lily)

I return the greetings of Princess Lily who went through the trouble of seeing me off at the teleport formation, and announce my departure.

From what I have seen, I don't feel like putting a store in the Empire, but I didn't voice out my rejection.

After giving the egg of Lancer to Grount who was rampaging and had to calm down, I returned to the capital when evening had come.

I didn't expect a superior dragon to get angry when touching the topic of age. Because you know, they are dragons that have been living for hundreds to thousands of years, and reincarnating. In essence, they live forever, so I thought they had lost the concept of age already.

Its blaze, roar, tail, and the magic that utilized the advantageous desert terrain; she rampaged quite a lot.

After I incapacitated her, I was finally able to speak with her.

I apologized to Grount-san once again, and when I spoke with her, I learned that she is actually a dragon with an age comparable to that of an adult woman.

When living for long, their personality stops changing at some point in time depending on the person, probably.

If things like Oba-san, or Oba-chan which are related to age are not mentioned, she is actually quite the gentle one.

Regarding my studying of the dragon society Root mentioned, I thought

he was referring to the Sand Sea.

Its appearance was a mystifying white desert, and that sand must have drunk quite the amount of blood from people as well, so it is some kind of stage where the history of hyumans and dragons has developed.

The other superior dragons have kindreds or people that serve them, so Root probably intended to show me those kind of things.

I wasn't the only one who thought that his actions were of bad taste; Grount was also angry at Root.

It is great that nothing serious happened.

By the time I returned to Ruinas it was already dark, but Tomoe and Shiki had finished packing and were waiting for me. And so, we were now returning just as planned.

Tomoe and Shiki who were mimicking me by lowering their heads, lift them up the moment I lift it as well.

Now then, let's head back.

"When you have any business, please contact Rotsgard. If there's something our side can prepare for you, we will happily do so." (Makoto)

"Please do give us a call. Well then, take care in your journey." (Lily)

I couldn't see any expectation from Princess Lily's face.

I think she had some sort of reason when she had me meet the hero, but...Tomoki is not here right now. I just can't read the actions of Gritonia.

They probably have some sort of complicated objective that isn't related to defeating the demon race in the war.

When that time comes, it will be made clear.

At the very least, I slightly understand how the Empire views us, so the standing I will be taking has been decided.

In that point, I think it is a high plus for me in coming to the Empire.

Enveloped by the teleportation light, the scenery changes.

Let's quickly move and leave Robin. If we do that, we can return to Asora without worries.

When we return to Rotsgard, next will be the place of the Demon Lord-sama huh.

I will be going to Kaleneon for a bit and meet with Rona, was it.

Tomoe knows the meeting point.

Talk about Kaleneon will definitely come, so it seems I will have to put that into order as well.

For me, that's a desirable outcome.

Anyways, it was a tiring visit to the Empire.

I want to quickly go back and sleep.

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"I see. In that case, you don't know what business Raidou had in going to the Sand Sea, right?"

"Sorry. He traversed through the desert at a baffling speed, so I was unable to follow him..." (Ginebia)

"I don't think Grount will do anything, but the connections of Falz are really a mystery. To think that he is acquainted with a superior dragon. He told me that he had some business in the Sand Sea, so let Raidou do as he wishes, but for him to take such actions was outside my expectations. I have been one-upped."

Receiving a report that the Kuzunoha Company had begun their teleportation, Lily called Ginebia to her room and asked about the details of the situation.

Even so, she only added a bit of information on top of what she had already reported when she returned. So the gist of it didn't change much.

She lost Raidou at the desert and doesn't know what he did after.

At the long distance, a loud sound rang out but it soon calmed down, and Raidou returned after a few hours.

Just in case, they are already trying to make contact with Grount and confirming her safety.

It was an abnormal situation.

“Tomoe and Shiki; those two followers of his were also lost from sight near the castle. The other party was not Limia or a demon race but a company, and yet, they really played us good.” (Lily)

“... Lily-sama, what do you think of them?” (Ginebia)

“The Kuzunoha Company? Right... they are an unknown factor. A bunch that I can’t tell whether they are allies or enemies. Regarding Raidou, from what Tomoki-sama says, he is a Japanese; in other words, an otherworlder.” (Lily)

“An otherworlder?! T-Then, is that person also a hero like Tomoki-sama?!” (Ginebia)

Ginebia was chanting her disbelief with an expression that didn’t hide her shock.

“It’s not sure. Tomoki-sama and Limia’s hero Hibiki appeared after receiving an oracle from the Goddess. But there have been several number of otherworlders that were not the case as well.” (Lily)

“This is the first I have heard of this. To think that there were people like that.” (Ginebia)

“Lorel has been hiding them from the foreign countries after all. It seems like they have taken in their customs you know? Have you heard about the Wise?” (Lily)

“Wise? If I remember correctly, it is a special rank in Lorel for people that possess special knowledge.” (Ginebia)

“Is how the foreign countries take it. In reality, it is Lorel giving special privileges to the otherworlders. That’s a Wise. Right now there’s not a single one, but there have been descendants from them, and that special knowledge is made as knowledge unique of that country.” (Lily)

“...”

“Anyways, Ginebia, good work today. You can leave now. Get a good rest.” (Lily)

“Understood… Excuse—” (Ginebia)

“Ah, you can’t go to Tomoki-sama’s place today either, got it? Please let him be alone for now.” (Lily)

“?!! U-Understood.” (Ginebia)

Seeing off Ginebia, the smile of Lily’s face was erased.

She was able to call Raidou and central people of the company to the Empire, but the objective they were aiming for was practically a blank.

For her, this is not a pleasant result.

Lily didn’t think that with just this conversation she would be able to take in Kuzunoha Company. But even so, she wanted to get information about them, and if possible, she wanted to attract at least one store from Kuzunoha Company into their Empire.

If she could make them place a store, they would be able to analyze the products, and it would make it easier to make contact with them.

To go to Rotsgard every time there’s business is something not that desirable for Lily. Also, currently the chances are low, but if Raidou closes the store in Rotsgard, they would have to go to Tsige which is an outrageously remote region.

They may pick up when contacting them, but it is certain that it will be inconvenient.

(The most that was accomplished was… Tomoki meeting with Raidou huh. In that point, it resulted just as planned, and the part about Raidou being an otherworlder was unexpected, but a favorable result. Otherworlder. Even so, I don’t feel the power of the Goddess from Raidou. It might be related to why he is not a hero.) (Lily)

In this occasion, Lily learned that Raidou was an otherworlder, a Japanese.

That forced deduction of Tomoki that was almost like a false accusation

was easily proved right by Raidou himself.

(An unsightly appearance uncharacteristic of hyumans, and he is not a demi-human. Tomoki probably said this haphazardly with this as basis, and yet... I see, that his close aides were not flustered by this, it is possible that this may be a lie. It is certainly true that there's few plusses in revealing his own background at that moment. Tomoe and Shiki have quite the sharp minds after all. But...is there a merit in lying about being Japanese? If his relationship with Tomoki is just as I predicted, then it is safe to assume that Raidou has no will to be taken into the Empire.) (Lily)

"Fuh..."

A small breath leaked out from Lily's mouth.

Walking, she had left her room, and was now heading to the room of Tomoki.

After the talk with Raidou, Tomoki had shut into his room and was alone without even taking his meals.

Because he himself wished to do so, his party members were unable to enter, and Lily also prohibited it.

(First I have to confirm with Tomoki huh. And with that, I will know what Raidou did. I might also be able to tell the depth of his power.) (Lily)

Knock knock

After a gentle knock, Lily confirmed that there was no reaction.

"... Tomoki-sama, it is Lily. The Kuzunoha Company has left. Please tell me about what happened the other day." (Lily)

"Lily, right now I can't meet you. Please let me stay alone for a bit, just a bit more." (Tomoki)

A weak voice.

"Just what in the world happened? They are guests I invited. If Raidou did something, that is my sin as well. Tomoki-sama, I implore you, please let me into the room." (Lily)

After that, Lily flattered Tomoki and thoroughly comforted him.

That state of self-depreciation from Tomoki is a state that Lily is familiar in dealing with.

After a while passed, the door that silently opened was proof of her expertise.

"... Please enter, Lily." (Tomoki)

"Tomoki-sama... just what in the world happened? Being this depressed!" (Lily)

Changing her Noh mask expression into one on the verge of crying, Lily shows Tomoki worry with her whole body.

Entering the room, Lily sits beside Tomoki who is sitting at the bed. She kindly listened to the story between Raidou and Tomoki while giving signs of comprehension.

Being attacked by surprise, he tried to fight back, but being unable to, he received his threats and violence, is what Tomoki said. That he was unable to obtain Tomoe.

(Tomoki says this. In that case, not only did the valkyries not pose any threat, Tomoki himself was completely defeated by Raidou. The attack that made Sofia retreat can't be used indoors, and his combat equipment was at its minimum at that moment, so it can be one of the reasons. Just that, Raidou himself didn't seem to have anything resembling a weapon. Maybe he is a magician, or it might be that he has trained as a warrior. From what I hear of Tomoki, it might be reasonable to consider that it can be both of them. A magician with a trained body huh. A troublesome type. Also, even if he wasn't at his best, to be able to overwhelm Tomoki, he is a more troublesome existence than I originally thought.) (Lily)

Lily analyzes Raidou from the story of Tomoki while chipping off the dramatized parts.

Contrary to her action of holding Tomoki's hand gently, her mind was cold and composed.

(Adding to that, he has Tomoe, Shiki and Mio. His three close aides have out-of-boundaries strength. If only they had the thought of slaughtering the demon race, it is at a level that I would want to abandon this thing and change it for him. Is it because my patronage is weak? No, that's not it. I don't think that Hibiki will move according to my plans at all, and looking at Raidou's behavior towards demi-humans, my hopes of pulling him in are thin. Doing war is actually the best situation. Because we can go around killing without any hesitation after all.) (Lily)

Lily was thinking about pulling in Hibiki or Raidou, but she soon erased that thought from her mind.

Even if it's possible, it would still be an hindrance in her own plans.

"Tomoki-sama, Raidou is the owner of frightening power, right? What should we do? Should we try pulling him into being our comrade? If Tomoki-sama so wishes, I..." (Lily)

"That guy Makoto... are you telling me to lower my head to him?" (Tomoki)

"... It is only for your sake, Tomoki-sama. If he turns into an enemy, it might turn everything into a mess. If it is okay, Ginebia, Yukinatsu, Mora, and I can endure a bit of the burden." (Lily)

She doesn't know if Raidou wishes for women.

No, since he directly spoke with Tomoki, she understood that the chances of that are low.

If she were to think about it calmly.

"Lily..." (Tomoki)

"Also, if we bring Kuzunoha Company to our side, as a result, Tomoe will be brought to our side as well. It will also grant your wish." (Lily)

"Tomoe!" (Tomoki)

"Yes. Then, I will quickly send a subordinate to—" (Lily)

"You can't!!" (Tomoki)

Tomoki shouts at Lily who was about to stand up.

“Tomoki-sama?” (Lily)

(Right. There’s no way you would be able to stomach something like that. As a hero, you wouldn’t be able to stomach the existence of Raidou. If it’s Hibiki, it would be possible to do it with a smile though.) (Lily)

Lily laughs from within.

Tomoki who can’t stomach having someone above him, would never be able to allow Raidou to ‘come’ to the Empire.

Then, what should she do?

That’s Lily’s objective.

Using Raidou, she will lead Tomoki into reaching a decision he once hesitated to take.

For the current Tomoki, this will probably look like the web of a spider suspending in hell, is what Lily imagines.

And that image was not that far from the truth.

“I don’t need someone like that. I am a hero. I will bring down the demons and the Demon Lord; an existence that reigns over the world. It doesn’t matter if he is Japanese as well. Like hell I will rely on that guy.” (Tomoki)

The hero’s duty-or at least that’s the title the Goddess has given to them-was to defeat the demon race, that’s all.

The last part about reigning was something that Lily had taken her time to imprint in Tomoki’s mind.

“... But he is strong. At this rate, he might become an obstacle.” (Lily)

After this, she only needs to slowly lead him into it.

Lily was calmly leading him into a decision.

“Then I just have to get stronger. Right, there’s no need to hesitate huh. That’s all there’s to it.” (Tomoki)

“No way. Tomoki-sama is even using that power that chips away your very life to fight against the demon race. Just what other kind of power are you aiming to have in that body of yours?” (Lily)

The new power that Tomoki obtained.

Lily heard that this is a powerful magic that can defeat in one hit the person considered the peak of this world, the Dragon Slayer.

It has quite a large range, and without any decay in strength, it activates at its highest output; a shining flame. Moreover, if by chance the target survives, it will inflict a special poison. In a war, it is a power that is scarily effective.

It has the price of chipping off Tomoki’s life, so it is something that can’t be abused, but Lily is sure that he would be able to use it without hesitating when in need.

For Lily, this new power of Tomoki gave her incredible joy. But because of this reason, she was troubled by the possibility of Tomoki obtaining a new power. No, accurately speaking, she was scared of the risk that comes from the acquisition of a new power.

He has obtained a spell that shaves off his own life, so she is most likely scared of the possibility of gaining another power that might affect his life.

“Lily, about what you said before leaving to Rotsgard, you can still prepare it, right?” (Tomoki)

“... Tomoki-sama, that’s poisonous to the body. It is something involved with the Empire’s research team that does body modification to go against the demon race. I think that there’s no need for Tomoki-sama now that you have obtained such a splendid power.” (Lily)

“No. In the end, even my charm was useless with Tomoe. But... if it’s not enough, I just need to increase it. She is a dragon. Then if I get a dragon element in me like Mora and make it one with my power, I will be able to obtain a charm power that even she can’t go against! Also, if I obtain the aptitude for more powers, it will also affect my attack power. Any

elements that will make me stronger, place them all in me!" (Tomoki)

"Tomoki-sama, you can't! Even if you defeat the demon race, what would be the point if you don't have life remaining by the time you will reign? Please take care of your life." (Lily)

"... I will win. At the war and everything else. If it doesn't end in my complete win, there's no point. I don't want to live by lying to myself anymore. I...will do whatever I wish and live without any regrets! I will crush Raidou and the demon race. I will make Tomoe mine. Like hell I will give up!! Lily, if you are not going to cooperate, I will do that method even if it's without you. I will definitely reach it!!" (Tomoki)

The eyes of Tomoki were filled with a dangerous light.

"For you to be...this cornered..." (Lily)

Lily faces away and trembles as if overcome with emotion.

"Please. I know it is conceited of me after rejecting it once already, BUT please lend me your strength! I wish for power. This is the first time I have tried so hard. I don't want to give up!!" (Tomoki)

"..."

"Lily!" (Tomoki)

"Under...stood. Please rest for today. I will do the preparations." (Lily)

"Thanks! Thanks, Lily!" (Tomoki)

"If you feel anything out of order in your body, definitely tell me please. Okay?" (Lily)

"Got it. I will show you that I can definitely bring victory to the Empire!!" (Tomoki)

"I will be waiting for that day with my whole heart. Well then, please rest Tomoki-sama." (Lily)

Receiving the words of Tomoki with her back, the princess that had an expression as if resolving herself to a heavy decision, turned around and lowered her head.

A while after she left his room, Lily returns to her own room with her grave expression still plastered on her face as she walks the corridor.

The state of the princess that showed it was not a trivial matter had spread through the castle, and it created several speculations.

And then, when she returned to her own room which she had security increased around, and threw herself to her canopy bed facing up.

Covering her eyes with her right arm, her mouth crooked into a smile.

“Kufufufu... ahahaha!! Just how gullible can he be?! Even if we win the war, Tomoki has already lost his peace and his time for enjoyment. Good job cutting his last remnant of hesitation. Raidou, thank you. If I just bring out your name, the Tomoki from now on will thoroughly desire power. You have done at least this much, ufufu.” (Lily)

The monologue of the laughing princess continued.

More power to Tomoki.

More pain to the demon race.

A big fire will fall upon this time of war.

As if charmed by Tomoki-no- charmed by war, the princess repeats her crazed laughter.

“... Really, an ideal hero. We were really destined to meet each other, Tomoki. It is not Raidou or Hibiki but you who will be the hero that grants my wish. That’s how it is... that’s how it is, right Goddess?” (Lily)

Just once, she whispered coldly with blank eyes as she gazes at the distance.

After that, she continued her loud laughter for a while, and in time, she had gone to sleep.

◇◆◇◆ Makoto’s Dream ◇◆◇◆

<Two Makotos will be showing up. But you are already acquainted with this anyways.>

Uhmm...

A desert huh.

I certainly did go to a desert today.

Returning to Asora with Tomoe and Shiki, I received a report about the Empire's hyuman body experimentation and its use in war, information about the Valkyries, and also about the research of guns.

I did ask them to investigate the atmosphere of the city, but the two of them really did get quite the deep information there.

There was one point that was in my mind.

The guns.

Princess Lily who had heard about this concept from Tomoki was zeal in recreating them.

Just that she was unable to solve the problem of spontaneous discharges and its size. In the end, the result was that they were able to recreate a handgun and rifle that Tomoki knows of, which requires a high amount of magic power. It couldn't properly shoot a metallic bullet.

If we take it from a different perspective, a somewhat skillful magician would be able to utilize this weapon for self-protection.

The cost doesn't match its performance and its usage in real scenarios is still low. Or more like, it just turned in a rare weapon.

Tomoe said that there's practically nothing to expect from its combat performance in the future.

From the victims of the spontaneous discharges, she set her sight on gunpowder and has changed her plan into utilizing them as bombs and its utilization.

In this world they can use magic power to increase its power, but it is a tool that can be used even by normal soldiers and civilians. At the current state, it is actually taking form.

She is truly tenacious.

Explosives and hyumans.

I don't think that's a good combination.

If you ask me which one I think is more dangerous between guns and explosives, it's something I can't judge yet.

But well, this is just my impression from the report I received about the Empire.

—-

Right now, I am looking at a desert.

It is not the white sand sea.

I was sleeping at Asora after all.

...

I see.

In other words, this is a dream huh.

This time it is a quarter-view huh. How complex.

"Even in this world, the moon of the desert is beautiful. What do you think?"

A voice.

Low and masculine.

It sounded like the voice of a man at the prime of his life.

"Hah... is that something you should say at this moment, Makoto?"

Makoto?

Does that mean, it is me?

?!!!!

Eeeeh?!

When I follow the voice and look, there were two shadows at the desert's night.

"Is it because it doesn't compare to the one of the White Desert? It is sad to say but, I haven't gone to the deserts of Earth. It is certainly true

that someone like me shouldn't be saying this huh." (Manly Makoto(lol))

... A beard.

My wording of 'boku' has turned into 'ore', and I have a beard.

This... just who is this Raidou-san?

"Are you an idiot? This is a desert you created yourself. That's why I am telling you what in the world you are saying."

"No matter who has created it, a desert is a desert, right? Tomoki." (Makotwo)

Tomoki.

Ah, certainly.

It is Tomoki.

There's plenty resemblance.

Yeah.

"You go talking about people being crazy, but you know, you are the one that is the craziest. Would you normally go changing a country into a desert? And with only one hit of a magic spell." (Tomoki)

"Tomoki, didn't you also use a spell that copies nuclear bombs? I think that's also inhumane you know. It is plenty into the madness territory." (Makotwo)

"Don't put me in your same level. Mine has a demerit of shaving my own life, and I use it with the objective of instilling fear in my opponents. If they surrender with that one attack, it is possible to avoid needless deaths in the war." (Tomoki)

"...That's your way of putting it. That power of yours was unnecessarily accelerated by the madness of Lily. And that...has made it impossible to return everything to how it originally was." (Makotwo)

Things about nukes and creating deserts, what a dangerous conversation.

It was like that at the last dream where senpai appeared, but these

dreams are way too violent.

I...do I have a dangerous ideology?

Maybe I just haven't noticed it yet. Am I tired?

"Can't return? Hyumans had to destroy the demon race. Because Hibiki died an early death, the weight of it all came onto Gritonia. If you are wailing about the acceleration of the war, go blaming that incompetent Hibiki." (Tomoki)

"Senpai huh. That person too, if you or I were to go help her, there was a chance she would have been saved. We could have avoided her dying helplessly against Io." (Makotwo)

"Stop the 'if' talk. At that time, we had to increase the defense of our own country. This was Lily's decision as well. Also, don't go assuming things. If I hadn't picked your dying self from the border of the world, you wouldn't even be existing right now, you know?" (Tomoki)

"You really bring out quite the old talk. About that case, I am actually grateful you know. Travelling through that desert for more than one week, I who was prepared for death, was given shelter by you guys. Looking back, I might have been happier if I just died at that time though." (Makotwo)

"Keh. And yet, you did quite the big thing. What's with this? Is this how you repay your benefactors?!" (Tomoki)

"It's not like I went against your orders, right? This was Lily's will. That's why I haven't gone against you until now. That's if you didn't give me any orders that would bring me harm, that is." (Makotwo)

"... 'Obtain Lorel', is what I told you though?" (Tomoki)

"That's why, I accomplished such an order that makes one question the sanity of it, and obtained it, right? This is Lorel. Do whatever you want with it. The people, history, knowledge; everything into dust. No, I turned it into sand, but this is without doubt Lorel Union." (Makotwo)

"What happened to the Valkyries that were with you?" (Tomoki)

“Sadly, they became sacrifices.” (Makotwo)

“So you killed them?” (Tomoki)

“What a bad accusation. They were just dragged into the plan and died, that’s all.” (Makotwo)

I-Incredible.

From their conversation just now, this desert is all Lorel Union?

And this is something I did with some sort of magic spell?

That me in the other dream clearly used Sakai in a different way than me. No, even if I say that the person there was me, it still feels incredibly weird.

“What about Yukinatsu who infiltrated first?” (Tomoki)

“Who knows. If she escaped, she should be somewhere; if she couldn’t escape, she died. In wars, people die. Enemies and allies alike.” (Makotwo)

“Even so, there’s no war where it is fine for allies to shoot the back of allies.” (Tomoki)

“Hoh… These are not the words I expected to hear from the man that killed all the emperor candidates and the parties that supported them, and turned into the next emperor.” (Makotwo)

“The emperor candidates and the ones following them were the minority though!” (Tomoki)

“You had already charmed almost all the other people after all. The people that remained were the loyal retainers that weren’t bewildered by it. That charm of yours won’t make what you did right.” (Makotwo)

“… The citizens, bureaucrats, and the army as well; they were wishing for my enthronement.” (Tomoki)

“That’s also the charm. I don’t know why you made me increase the power of that charm and why you depended on it.” (Makotwo)

“… What did you say?” (Tomoki)

Uh.

What this me just said... I actually think the same way.

Why is this guy so stuck into charm?

This may be a dream, but the Tomoki that I met at the Empire was also dependant on it and seemed to be using it frequently.

“Instilling others to have a good opinion of you. That means you are dyeing others into your own colors.” (Makotwo)

“And what about it? What’s wrong with it? Using one’s own charm as weapon is not really something strange.” (Tomoki)

“This is not charm, you are charming them. To plant your own will into others. Putting it in another way, you are just mass producing people that follow your own image. Forcefully instilling deep affection into the minds of others, you make them your slaves. Someone narcissistic like you probably doesn’t pay it any mind, but from my point of view, this is not mutual understanding but masturbation.” (Makotwo)

“Y-You!!” (Tomoki)

“I won’t say that Hibiki-senpai’s charisma is any different from your charm. If I had to talk about personal relationships, the two are practically the same after all. But you grew too dependant of it. As a result, in the Empire there’s only you and your puppets. It became a country of zombies.” (Makotwo)

“Shut up...If I didn’t do that, people like you and Hibiki would be sprouting everywhere!!” (Tomoki)

“So you don’t need people that go against your will huh. I see. My olden question has been answered.” (Makotwo)

“... Talking all high-and-mighty. Then what about you? Lily, she was also one of my slaves. The first woman I turned into a slave. And you who were attached to her and turned a country into sand, what about you? Try saying something!” (Tomoki)

I-Is this a flow where I am in love with Princess Lily?

No, this me?

What a fantasy-filled development.

“Lily was not caught in your charm at all. Even in her dying breath.” (Makotwo)

“... What?” (Tomoki)

“She was only using your power. In the time of the Goddess’ silence, Lily had lost her mother. Unable to eliminate that sadness, unable to accept that reality, she had lived in the political world just like that. Those warped feelings must have made her view the existence of a hero as amusing. The Goddess that goes silent or saves hyumans at a whim, the Goddess that didn’t save her parents. A hero that was given so late. That’s you, Tomoki. Lily was wringing you, using you to slaughter the demon race, and then was trying to turn a mess of the Empire that let her parents die. No, in essence, it was fulfilled huh.” (Makotwo)

“Wring me out? Lily was? You... Makoto, what in the hell are you saying?” (Tomoki)

“If I had met Lily, if I had met her earlier than you, it might not have led her into such a road of madness and sadness. A stupid decision from indecisiveness that led to her death. I can’t lament it enough.” (Makotwo)

“So you go venting on me huh. In the end, you are just getting chained by the past, and completely ignoring the present and the future it will bring!! If you had such power, you would have been able to finish the war a lot more simply. Something like Lily, if you didn’t mind used goods, I wouldn’t have minded giving her to you if you just grovelled.” (Tomoki)

“... Can’t be helped. The moment I noticed my power was when I killed the Demon Lord after all.” (Makotwo)

“...Ah?” (Tomoki)

!!!

Killed the Demon Lord?!

I don’t think this way.

I don't hold any affection for the princess, and I don't have any intentions of killing the Demon Lord.

I am not thinking about any of these at all!!

Princess Lily is indeed an older and beautiful girl, and is slightly to my taste but!

"At that moment, I craved power for the first time. While you were pathetically lying down on the floor. The awakening that resulted from this, was neither a grateful thing nor a good timing at all. Because it was already all too late. Just like what you said, I am venting on you, and while at it, picking a fight on that trash Goddess. That's the only thing I could think of." (Makotwo)

"The Demon Lord...was killed by me with that spell..." (Tomoki)

"You only made the Demon Lord get serious. While you were comfortably sleeping, I killed them. The Demon Lord, and the demon race as well. And, I will be killing you now." (Makotwo)

"What are you saying..." (Tomoki)

"If I do that, the Goddess will also come out. If she doesn't, I will just have to create one or two more deserts. It is like increasing the size of the World's Border. I wonder how long will that Goddess stay silent for. Looking forward to seeing that." (Makotwo)

"This world finally finished its battle you know?! Isn't it natural to create peace from now on?! You, did you go completely insane?!" (Tomoki)

"Having peace after a war, who decided that? Once war is over, another war will occur. Those kind of cases happen too." (Makotwo)

"...Seriously, I shouldn't have saved you at that time. Understood, I will be bringing you to hell here. Let me tell you, your spell won't work on me. It will be one sided, but don't complain." (Tomoki)

"While it is night, right? Your immortality is also a power that the Goddess gave you. I don't care. I will be killing you until morning. Go to

the netherworld as the sun rises." (Makotwo)

Hey hey hey, is it turning into a fight?

But how will this me be fighting? I have a slight interest in it.

Because he has an attack that can create a desert.

Also, I am interested in the sword he has in his hand.

I don't have any knowledge in swords. But does this me have? If he does, just what kind of sword style will he swing with?

I want to see.

I want to overwatch this.

The previous dream had ended in the middle but this time...

Eh.

What.

My vision is fading.

The two fighting are growing distant.

A change of vision as if being lifted up.

The desert steadily shows a full picture. Ah...

"... Damn it, as expected, a dream. It is a dream I don't see at the Empire or at Rotsgard though." (Makoto)

I silently open my eyes in my sleeping face-up position.

"But I had turned into quite the stern-looking old man. He was even saying 'ore'. As usual, Tomoe and the others were nowhere in sight." (Makoto)

Also, I was in the wastelands for more than one week, was it?

If I were to totter that much, I certainly could die.

That time I was thrown into the borders, depending on where I stepped into, I might have ended up that way as well.

My back feels chilly just thinking about it.

“Since making archery a habit in Asora, this happened. I know that this is not a precognitive dream, but it leaves a bad aftertaste.” (Makoto)

I can’t go back to sleep, so while thinking that using the bow might not be a bad idea, I was somehow able to get up but couldn’t get in the mood.

I forcefully wrap myself in my blanket and closed my eyes to the dream funnel.

Chapter 182: The Foggy Morning

“Well then, take care Waka-sama.”

“Take care Raidou-se–no, Raidou-dono.”

Kaleneon’s national border.

A winter morning covered in thick mist.

At the bridge hanging at a cliff, a group was lined up with their heads lowered at the three that were departing.

The back figure of the three were already thinly hidden by the mist and had turned into shadows.

Not only is it a cold early morning, in this day where even mist came out, the cold felt even stronger. But the people that saw them off didn’t shiver one bit and acted firm.

But the state was slightly strange.

From within their group, there were many shadows that didn’t belong to hyumans.

“Now then, by the time they return, I need to have another report ready.”

From the two that were at the front of the group that saw them off, one of them opened its mouth. The voice that came from the slightly small body was the voice of a woman.

But the figure of the girl was not that of a hyuman.

“T-They are really going to meet the demon race. As always, what an unpredictable person.”

Another one also opens its mouth.

This one is also a woman. A hyuman this time.

“Eva, we are returning. Is that okay? Having crops that can be grown in winter, you did tell me that proudly, so we will be continuing with that.”

“Ema-san, I did say I had some in mind, but what’s important is that

there's not enough arable land for planting. First we should cultivate new land and keep an eye on the progress of—" (Eva)

"I have already confirmed it. Slow. Honestly speaking, the actions of you girls are just slow. In the future, I won't be accepting excuses blaming the winter. Ah also, I will be checking the tax rate again." (Ema)

"Uuuh, about the tax rate, because we are beginning at a point where we have practically no national treasury, I think that currently, this is the time where we have to save as much of the country's money as possible. Of course, I did put the livelihood of the residents first and placed a tax rate that is on the level of the large countries. I did it with the belief that this was the most conventional method of tax rate." (Eva)

A conversation between Eva and Ema.

Even if their names are similar, their standings seem to be quite different.

Most of all, it was a conversation of a hyuman and a race that's not hyuman, so it is quite rare for the hyuman to be the one at the lower standing.

"What's conventional about a 7:3 government. Waka-sama has gone through the trouble of arranging the residents and entrusted their lives to us, no matter the race, I won't accept starvation and dying from cold." (Ema)

"7:3-what?" (Eva)

"The land-tax system from the Edo period would work better in this situation. Seriously, something as important as getting a country, and the concerned party in charge of the ruling only has this level of intelligence. I can only call it stupid. In this country where there's a mixture of hyumans and demihumans, there's no way we can use the common sense of hyuman's country creation." (Ema) <In this tax system, the government takes half of the year's crops while the farmers keep the other half.>

"... Sorry." (Eva)

In this scolding that could be taken as unreasonable, Eva honestly

apologizes.

Because in the while that she has been acquainted with the woman called Ema, she has more or less understood her skills and personality.

Eva didn't understand the meaning of the words 7:3 government or the land-tax system of the Edo period, but Ema must have judged that the tax system she was about to set was not the most appropriate one.

(I thought that the Orc race, even if their names and figures were different, they were all simple-minded people who were driven by instinct. Highland Orcs, those girls, I don't know where this race inhabits, but they have knowledge on the level of scholars. Though imperfect, I was a librarian at the Academy, and yet, I can't hold a candle to these people. Raidou-sensei, the people supporting you from the back, there's really not a single normal one.) (Eva)

Eva was introduced to Ema by Makoto the moment they arrived at Kaleneon.

'She is a kind and dependable person.' Is what he said as he made her face an Orc.

Eva who had pledged in her heart to throw away her common sense and stop thinking that things are abnormal, had her determination crushed in an instant.

To think that there would be a scene in her life where she would have a conversation with an Orc, Eva wouldn't be able to imagine it even in her wildest dreams, so it couldn't be helped.

Having her native country destroyed, losing her territory, and condemned by her relatives; in that severe standing, Eva who was half-controlled by madness, met Raidou-Makoto – at Rotsgard, and that madness of hers was blown away.

With these consecutive events outside the boundaries of common sense, maybe she is getting her sanity back, or it is just that a new type of madness is dyeing her now; she probably doesn't know clearly yet.

"What about the other situations?"

Ema turned to her back.

There stood a blue scaled Lizardman, an orc that has a bigger build than Ema, a white winged winged-kin, and a dwarf who has around the same height as Ema.

"...Right. Leaving aside Eva's words, isn't there any place that can be reclaimed currently? If it's new land for cultivation, we have quite a lot though. Also, if we just pointlessly reclaim leveled ground, in the current state where we can't deal with the mamonos, it would be meaningless."

The first one to respond was the Lizardman.

"Deal with, are you referring to that level of demonic beast? Within the populace that has come to Kaleneon, there's adventurers and former adventurers. In terms of experience in battle, there should be a reasonable amount though?" (Ema)

Ema's face turns serious at the report of the Lizardman.

"There are many that still haven't adapted to the environment in this country. Also, we are lacking people with genuine talent. After the invasion of the demon race, the amount of hyumans that are used to doing work in a snowy environment are most likely low. In the first place, if there were survivors of people that lived around this area, the situation would have been slightly different."

"There aren't?" (Ema)

"There are only a few. Experienced in battle, there are zero. These probably has already reached your ears as well Ema-dono, but the bunch here are people that had been living by relying on the blessing of the Goddess. It is questionable how much knowledge they have about living in independence."

"...Even if we have new land, security will be necessary. But there are few who would be able to properly guard against the mamonos, is what you are trying to say?" (Ema)

"That's how it is. There's a few adventurers, on a degree that we can barely use properly. It would be more realistic to bring more from the

outside with requests, or having us assigned to it. According to the result of the investigation, the demonic beasts that inhabit this country are more active in winter. From the report of Eva saying that if we are to do training it should be at a time other than winter, the results of that investigation are most likely not far from the truth."

"Understood. Cooperation with the outside. Regarding the topic about bringing adventurers in, I will leave it as a suggestion for now. It would be pointless if we are the ones doing everything after all." (Ema)

"Got it. But is it okay to continue the training and guarding for now?"

"Of course. I will be counting on you." (Ema)

At this occasion, Eva barely spoke anything.

But there was no displeasure in her face.

It is not that she is hiding it.

In the time that she has been in contact with the mamonos and demihumans that Raidou has introduced her to, she had decided in her heart to learn their common sense.

The lines they are demanding are absurd, but in the first place, the very point of obtaining a country is also in the crazy and reckless class.

Raidou and the Kuzunoha Company that were able to accomplish that very feat in a land that was completely in control of the demon race, there's no need to say that it is nothing but abnormal.

But she was the one who relied on them, and the whole current situation is that she has no one else to rely on in Kaleneon aside from them.

In that case, she resolves herself to move in the same standards as them.

That's why she is in the middle of learning.

Ema and the other people are definitely not looking down on Eva.

They are not taking her lightly either.

They are only taking the action of training her as a proper representative of a country.

Scarily strict.

Eva was in a spot where even if she were to break, they wouldn't let her.

After the Lizardman stepped back, Ema looks at the Orc.

But the Orc who was looked at, shook his head to the sides.

"There's nothing to report on my side. We continue to collect information about the demonic beasts while securing food. Regarding the hunting, there's the point that it is centered in the adventurers, and its progress is reasonable. From Ema's perspective, it would probably be around 80% in terms of numbers."

"... So the other 20% is not catching up huh. Do you think we can still increase the number of people in charge?" (Ema)

"... There would be no problem, but if we want to certainly avoid unforeseen events, I would suggest we leave a few. Increasing the numbers is not always good. For us the guardians, and also for the people that do their best in hunting."

"Understood. I will be arranging it, so for now, I will leave it to three." (Ema)

"Roger that."

After the short talk between Orcs, next is the Winged-kin that took a step forward.

Within the people here, it is the one who has the closest appearance to a hyuman, but the wings at its back negate that possibility. There's also several special traits that are different from a hyuman. Eva was greatly surprised when she learned that they are an heretic existence even among demihumans.

"There's no problem in the security of the national border. There were sightings of people that seemed to be demons, but they haven't invaded. There have been cases where some have ignored our warnings, turning

into a fight. But we were able to crush them. There was no damage from our side."

"Good work. Then, is the number of personnel for the security and other tasks appropriate at the moment?" (Ema)

"No need. The people that are put in charge of security are beginning to have free time in their hands. Because they are getting accustomed, the area they can be in charge of increases. This is thanks to Tomoe-sama's training in the techniques to search enemies. There won't be any problems in placing some in other tasks."

"I see. That's a great thing to hear. Then can you put out some candidates later?" (Ema)

"Understood."

Kaleneon is a special country that has a cliff as their national border.

Its security has been tasked to the Winged-kin who possess the ability of flight, and they haven't permitted any to invade.

To enter the current Kaleneon, it is completely necessary to have the permission of Kuzunoha Company.

And the last to step forward is the dwarf.

Before saying anything, he already had a troubled face.

"Now then, what should I begin with?"

"Is the deployment of tools being delayed as expected?" (Ema)

"That's because in the current Kaleneon, no matter how many craftsmen like us are, it would never be enough. If there were more residents here specialized in the earth element, the situation might be a little different though. But the lack of personnel has reached a helpless level. Even so, we are in a situation where we can't bring out more personnel from our ranks. I have suggested this before but, is it not possible to call other dwarfs to be residents? There's a number of volcanoes at Kaleneon, and I have checked it out; it seems to be a relatively good environment for dwarfs to live in."

“About that matter, we are waiting for the decision of Waka-sama. But it seems he is hesitating since they would probably have to recruit from Lorel Union.” (Ema)

“I feel bad for troubling Waka-sama. But I don’t think the dwarfs of Lorel have any attachment to the Union. Because no matter where we are from, we are craftsmen at heart. Even if we exclude the ones who went to the Spirit religion, it wouldn’t be a problem if the dwarfs themselves approve of it. Can’t you tell him this?”

“I will try and see. Just that, Waka-sama is in that state probably because it might turn into a situation where we are chipping off the national power of Lorel Union, so I am not sure if it will help in having him make a decision though.” (Ema)

“It is true that we would be taking potential away from their country if we were to bring them in. He even thinks about such difficult things. Anyways, we are lacking people on our side. Whether it is hyuman or demihuman, if there’s anyone interested in being a blacksmith, I would like you to tell me immediately. Armors, farming tools, constructions; there’s a mountain of things to do.”

“I am sorry for having you go through so much work. I will try to take into consideration any candidates by today.” (Ema)

“I am counting on you. We will gather up the information of the dwarf community’s special traits in Lorel and anything that might prove useful for Waka-sama into documents. I will send them to you when we are done.”

“That would be a great help. Well then Eva, I think you already know but, we will be sleeping at the same time as always. Let’s return.” (Ema)

Eva who was lending an ear to their conversation with interest, stiffened her face at the sudden words of Ema.

Every other side has already turned to town and beginning their return.

“As always? Uhm... I feel like in these three days, I haven’t slept properly at all though. Is that what you are referring to as ‘sleeping at the

same time as always'?" (Eva)

"You are properly sleeping for 1 hour already. I have given you aiding medicine so that you don't have any problems in health though? Are you telling me you haven't been taking them?" (Eva)

"I am! It is because I am taking them that my heart is weary but my body is strangely energetic! How long will this kind of situation continue for?!" (Eva)

Eva, who was doing her best a few days ago, unable to see the end of this nightmare, she objects at the statement that was as if telling her this is how it will normally be.

"How long? Obviously, it will be until you have grown enough that you don't need our assistance. You are already an adult and still unable to give proper responses after all. Do give it your best." (Ema)

"Proper responses?! I was suggested such an absurd plan just like that! On top of that, Raidou-sensei didn't seem to have much knowledge in politics and management!!" (Eva)

"What are you trying to do by placing Waka-sama as a comparison. It is pointless. Lady, can you nonchalantly split earth?" (Ema)

"..."

"How stupid. Now, straighten your back and walk proudly." (Ema)

Ema rejects the cry of Eva and quickly walks forward.

Chasing after her, Eva desperately tried to straighten her back that felt as if it would bend at any moment.

"Eva, becoming a representative of a country is not something simple. Knowledge, wisdom, power. In this situation where we are living without getting involved with foreign countries, we can still look for stability. In the future when diplomacy begins, it will not be in this proportion. If you don't grow at a pace faster than what Ema-dono is setting, the future of Kaleneon will be dark."

"Seriously. You yourself don't have that overwhelming appeal that

brings others together after all. The residents here are people that didn't live here originally, so bringing people together is a harsh talk though. Knowledge and wisdom. And the easiest to obtain is knowledge. Desperately learn."

"Things like nobles and royalty; because you are hung by such things that are determined by heritage, you act spoiled when in a position of having land. If you want to stand on top of others, you will have to be able to show them something worthy of it."

"It may be a dream that came from being half-crazed, but since it has been granted, you will have to undertake the responsibility. Give it up, you can't escape."

Catching up with the Lizardman, Orc, Winged-kin, and Dwarf; Eva received grateful words from them.

A wry smile was plastered onto her face.

"It might be more comfortable if I just end up crazy like in my time at Rotsgard." (Eva)

"Madness huh. That might be good too. It would certainly give you more resolve and power than what your current self has."

"What's important is for you to have power befitting that of a ruler and are able to make decisions. There's no need to be sane for that. Isn't that fine?"

"Your results could disappoint Waka-sama. Even if you have to go crazy, you will have to show good results."

"No matter how you end up, you will fall into the same situation, so isn't sanity playing a big part in your happiness?"

Merciless words came flying.

"Everyone, please don't spoil Eva-san. This girl will be carrying Kaleneon and lifting it up after all. She is a person that has exchanged such a contract with Waka-sama. To get it easier by going crazy is just—" (Ema)

‘There’s no way I would permit it.’

The last words that came from Ema were all reflected in the eyes of the others which were directed at Eva.

Eva hangs her head.

The revival of a ruined country.

That’s a miracle.

And yet, it has been granted.

Then, the price of it, its compensation; no matter what it is, she has to pay it.

It has turned into something unbelievable.

Thinking that, Eva walks while looking forward.

If she were to meet her past self, she felt like telling herself to look properly at reality.

She held that small sentiment in her.

◇◆◇◆◇◆◇◆

A thick mist is still covering the surroundings.

Already knowing that this is not a strange occurrence around these parts, the girl was thinking that it would have been better if mist hadn’t come out today of all days.

Crossing her arms, she waits for the guests.

At her side there’s a giant with four arms, and just like her, he was silently standing there.

At their back, there were elite demon soldiers lined up completely armed.

A twitch.

The giant opened his closed eyes and looked at the front.

“They are here?”

“Seems so. There are three.”

“It would have been better if we had a clearer view, today of all days.”

“Right. We are going to welcome that, and yet, having our vision this bad makes me feel uncomfortable.”

“Guests huh.”

“Calling him Devil would be rude, right? It seems that time it wasn’t his true intentions. I think it would be proper to call him Raidou.”

“Right. Io, let me tell you just in case. Don’t go creating any trouble until we reach the capital, okay?”

“I return those words right back at you, Rona. After being dealt with so easily, there’s no way I would have hostility or anything like that. I only feel dread.” (Io)

“It is to the level that our Demon General ace has voiced out his dread. Moreover, for some reason, we are meeting them right at the center of our territory.” (Rona)

Rona let’s out a sigh.

She who is specialized in gathering information, was letting out her weakness at the guests that she couldn’t grasp.

She didn’t show this to the person in question through force of personality. Even she was showing slight weakness in a stage where they haven’t made contact yet.

“It is around a few tens of kilometers from the place that Reft had disappeared in huh. He doesn’t remember what happened at that place, and the reconnaissance of Kaleneon is also...” (Io)

“No results. At most, we only know that there’s a cliff where in the past there wasn’t. It is also unknown if there’s a bridge placed on it or not though.” (Rona)

“There have been casualties in our forces, right?” (Io)

“The ones that went too deep were wiped out. The whole unit is gone, so

we don't know what happened at all. It is hard to think that they are the ones involved in this, but the timing is just too fitting." (Rona)

"In the end, the best choice would be to wait for Reft's memories to recover huh. As long as there's no more real harm, Kaleneon is not a place with important value for us. There's no need to increase the damage by poking it." (Io)

"It is mortifying but that's how it is. Right now we have no choice but to leave it." (Rona)

(... I will be interfering a little from outside the army though.) (Rona)

Rona adds this inside her mind.

"But if they are involved with the abnormality of Kaleneon as you say, and on top of that, they are having us meet them at a place close to it..." (Io)

"..."

"The Kuzunoha Company, and also Raidou; they would be a sly bunch. That man didn't seem like the scheming type though." (Io)

"...Yeah. It seems like he has made his appearance." (Rona)

Io and Rona correct their posture.

From the mist, three shadows appear and their figures were soon visible.

"Did we make you wait much?"

The man at the very center looked at Io and Rona, and said this apologetically.

"No. In terms of time, I would say you are early. Welcome, Raidou-dono. And also your companions. Because of security reasons, we couldn't provide you a teleportation service. I thank you for your understanding in that. From here there's still quite the distance, but we will take responsibility in guiding you. Sorry for the late introduction, I am Io. I serve under the Demon Lord as a Demon General." (Io)

“You know already but let me do it again, I am Rona. Just like Io, I am one of the Demon Generals. It has been a while, Raidou. We have been waiting anxiously for your meeting with our Lord. I thank you for accepting this unreasonable request of ours.” (Rona)

In contrast to Io’s words, Rona gives a frank greeting.

Her expression was also serious and straight-laced, and her smile was gentle.

“Kuzunoha Company’s representative, name’s Raidou. Pleased to make your acquaintance. These are the friends I mentioned before, Mio and Shiki.” (Makoto)

“Mio-desu. Pleased to meet you.” (Mio)

“Shiki. I will be in your care.” (Shiki)

After Raidou made his introduction, the other two at his side make a light introduction as well.

The black haired girl wearing a black kimono introduced herself as Mio and seemed somewhat cold.

The red haired man wearing a white robe was gloom and composed. He introduced himself as Shiki with a smile. His introduction also had a notable attitude.

“Well then, it will be a journey of several days. Let’s depart.” (Io)

With the words of Io as a signal, the demon troops arrange their formation.

In this territory where hyumans have not stepped into for several decades, and the untrodden territory further beyond that hyumans have not arrived to; the Kuzunoha Company representative, Raidou, makes one step into it.

Chapter 183: Shiki-sensei once again

This is something i have thought in the White Sand Sea as well but, it seems this world still has a lot more mysterious places.

As expected of a fantasy world.

Being received by Io and Rona, we journeyed together with them for several days.

There would be a blizzard first thing in the morning, but a one-time per day cycle was normal. The attacks of mamonos were splendidly dealt with by the demons.

The mamonos that came out had the same lineup as the mamonos in Kaleneon, so I was contemplating taking them as reference to learn the methods of dealing with it.

What surprised me was the second day at noon.

It was still noon, and yet, when I thought it had become dark, the sky became black in one breath.

By the time we advanced for 1 short hour, it was already night.

The ground had changed into ice at several locations, and it felt as if we were brushing the surface. The blizzard had strengthened, and it made me think that this is a place that hyumans wouldn't be able to live in at all.

But maybe in this place this was a common occurrence, the demon side didn't show any panic, and created a barrier against cold just like they did at the first day as they continued their lively advance.

How fearsome is the northern country.

In the end, we advanced through a blizzard in what could be considered an everlasting darkness. A pretty rare to get experience.

At the third day...morning doesn't come.

Since 5 in the afternoon of the second day, it has been night all the time.

Do places exist where the sun doesn't come out? If that's the case, no wonder it is so cold.

At this day, the demon race showed a slightly panicked state.

A type of mamono. If it were only that, it wouldn't be that out of ordinary though. It seems that the level of the enemy was higher than they thought.

A big-framed lion with quite the intensity. Its body hair is pure white.

I have not heard reports of its sighting in Kaleneon, and this is also my first time seeing it.

Several lion males(or so I think) with imposing mane attacked us.

For males to do the hunting is pretty surprising.

When they jumped at us, I could clearly tell its size.

The demon soldiers that stepped forward served as a measuring tool.

As big as a large-sized one box van.

And it was fast.

The demon soldiers that were hurriedly trying to fix their formation were crunch to death in an instant. It seems there were people that survived, but the people that had come out to my front were no good.

They may be people which I have only exchanged light conversations, but it gives me a sad feeling.

I don't know if this will serve as a memorial, but I will at least defeat these guys. When I thought about beginning, Shiki's hand hit mine.

When I look at his face, he shook his head to the sides.

I don't know why was that, but I decide to overlook the situation for a bit.

In the end, Io and Rona also participated in the fight, and the white lions were defeated.

After that, unexpected things happened multiple times.

Mamonos that were clearly stronger than the previous ones were appearing frequently, and the soldiers that were accompanying us ended up wounded or dead.

The barrier for cold has been maintained and the pace hasn't changed, but this day made me feel as if I were wounded all over.

Looking back at it, I feel like it wasn't normal.

Right now we have finally gotten time for a break, and we were resting at the tent that Shiki had prepared.

Rona had prepared a tent for us as well, but we turned down the offer.

We did tell them that we would be bringing the necessary ourselves, but they probably were unsure if we would be able to properly calculate the coldness in these areas. It seems they brought our share as well just in case.

"Shiki, did you foresee that it would be this cold? This tent seems to have an impressive protection against cold." (Makoto) "Yes. The demon race territory is a land of intense cold after all. I made this tent so that it can be spread out immediately, and be able to deal with any type of environment." (Shiki) "That's a great help. But you know, it seems the demon race did prepare our share too but, was it okay to decline it?" (Makoto) "Yeah. Even if it is of lower quality than this, we will be returning to Asora at night to rest anyways, so wouldn't it be better to accept their good will?" (Mio) Ah, so Mio also held the same opinion as me.

In that case, it means there's some sort of problem in it huh.

I see.

Is there a chance that being lend things from the demon side will lead to spying on us?

"It is just that those things were prepared in anticipation that we would be unprepared, also, I don't want to rely on the things that Rona has prepared." (Shiki) As I thought.

“Well, that talk about Rona was a joke, but thinking about each other’s position in this journey, she wouldn’t be able to do anything weird.” (Shiki) …

As I thought, I’m glad I didn’t say anything.

Would it be okay to ask why?

It kinda makes me hesitate.

“Why-desu?” (Mio)

Naizu-desu Mio.

“Because we are guests they have invited, and Rona has taken the job of a guide by the orders of the Demon Lord. Even if she is like that, Rona is loyal to the Demon Lord, so she wouldn’t do something like abandoning the mission. That’s why, even if we use the tent they have prepared and go back to Asora, there wouldn’t be any problems. Checking the inside of the tent is something that she would definitely not do.” (Shiki) “Isn’t it fine to just do it without getting caught?” (Mio)

“I am here. She understands that if she were to get caught by me, it would all turn detrimental. And there’s Waka’s power overwatching as well, so that also plays a part.” (Shiki) Shiki really does know Rona well.

Instead of close friends, it feels more like a dog and monkey relationship though. <means bad relationship> “Hah… what a pain.” (Mio)

Mio does one sigh.

For these last few days, she hasn’t been taking any satisfying meal at breakfast and lunch after all.

“Also, Waka-sama, I am sorry for stopping your hand a while ago.” (Shiki) He lowered his head.

It is not really something that requires him to apologize.

I do want to hear the reason why though.

“You don’t need to apologize. But what was the reason? I just thought about helping out for a bit.” (Makoto) “That’s the reason. That was

Rona's play, Waka-sama." (Shiki)

"...Eh?" (Makoto)

"I don't know if she anticipated the numbers as well, but that woman wanted to have Waka-sama cooperate by having a strong enemy attack." (Shiki) No no, isn't that being oversuspecious?

Their allies also suffered quite the bad time there too, you know?

"No well, that's..." (Makoto)

"As proof, they were properly able to deal with it even without us going out ourselves, right? Deal with everything." (Shiki) ...

A white lion, snow guardian dog, and a Frost Dragon that had scales resembling ice; it is true that the demons were able to deal with it by themselves.

But would that give enough foundation?

"... I still have a bit more basis. Even in that situation, they didn't cut off the barrier against cold, and even when the people decreased, they soon rearranged their formation. It could be evaluated as splendid discipline, but for me, it looked like they were reacting in a way as if they had already anticipated it beforehand." (Shiki) The barrier against cold was not dissolved even when in the middle of the battle.

They also quickly filled up the holes in their formation.

"Now that you mention it, there were several who were frequently keeping an eye on us while in battle. Rona was acting as normal though." (Makoto) I didn't notice at all.

Within that blizzard in the darkness, I didn't pay much attention to my surroundings.

I gotta reflect on that.

"Yeah. The demons won't request for cooperation from their side. But if we are the ones stepping forward to provide it, it would be possible. They would be able to see at least a bit of our side's power, and it would also create a sense of camaraderie." (Shiki) "So you are saying that they

already expected the deaths of their subordinates?" (Makoto) "They must have taken death into account. For the sake of knowing the whole picture, they were prepared to take sacrifices. To the point that even the demon race that hasn't grasped us completely, is welcoming us as country-level guests." (Shiki) That in itself is pointless though.

"For a mere company representative, this degree of reception is too exaggerated as expected huh. There's two demon generals after all." (Makoto) "Yeah. Also, Io's self-introduction and Rona's greeting, did you notice?" (Shiki) That huh.

I also felt something slightly strange from that.

Even so, it is to the level that I wouldn't pay it any mind unless pointed out though.

"Yeah, something was strange there. Io was acting as if this were our first time meeting, and Rona was frank like the time before the event with the Variants." (Makoto) "Exactly. Io wanted to null what happened at the kingdom's capital, and Rona wanted to imply that her real self was the one before the Variant incident." (Shiki) What's with that.

"A-Are they not feeling well?" (Makoto)

But if that's the case... It was the right choice not to say: 'Didn't we meet at the Kingdom's capital though?'.

If I said that, it would be like completely negating the expectations of Io.

"The Demon Lord will probably say something regarding that, but I think that it does have that kind of meaning. In other words..." (Shiki) Shiki cuts his words for a second and narrows his eyes.

"'We want to wash away the 'unintentional bad things' that happened and create a good relationship.' It seems like the demon race really wants Waka-sama and the Kuzunoha Company. At this rate, when we reach the capital, they might even make a parade for us. Kufufufu." (Shiki) Don't kufufu.

Aren't you turning into Tomoe, Shiki?

If you enter the dark side, my internal oasis will disappear.

Please spare me from that.

“A parade. If it were a party, there would be worth in it.” (Mio)

“Mio-dono, having a parade without a party is basically impossible. In the ranks of welcoming, a banquet is a basic after all.” (Shiki) “... Then that’s fine-desu ne.” (Mio)

Not good.

“If we talk about the characteristics of the demon race cuisine, it would be for example; a meat that they leave half frozen and make thin slices of it just like that to eat. Using different flavored ice, they make a variety of iced cuisine. The last time I went there, I only saw to that extent, but they are in such a prejudiced environment, so there should be a lot more than that.” (Shiki) “Are we going to enter the capital by today?” (Mio)

“No, I heard that today we will be staying the night at a town. The capital will be tomorrow.” (Shiki) “Eh, ah yeah, I am looking forward...to the frozen cooking.” (Makoto) I answered unconsciously.

...Cold food in winter huh.

Eating ice cream in a kotatsu is ordinary, but I wonder if that’s the same case here.

I stand up and look at the state outside.

An ice ground where we can’t see what’s ahead anymore, even the stars can’t be seen. Complete darkness and violent blowing wind and snow.

Only the sound of the strong winds resounded.

Even if you tell me about frozen meat and ice cuisine in a place like this, I don’t feel any sort of appetite welling up from me.

◇◆◇◆◇◆◇◆

Clank

The door silently closes.

“Root! You...what’s with suddenly sending an out of common sense

along with the egg of Lancer to the Sand Sea and making a mess out of it, and Oba-san!!"

The young woman continued shouting words that had no coherence until she finally calmed down. Taking off her hood, she approaches the person that was at the end of the room.

Unbuttoning her tunic, she takes off her hooded robe and throws it away towards the sofa at the side.

"That's quite the greeting-ja na, Sand Wave. It is our long time reunion and you suddenly come like this."

"?!! Ah, sorry. I reflexively..." (Grount)

"As expected huh. Well, I believed that Makoto-kun would definitely be able to do it! The desert is an area that not even I can peek at, so in times like this, I truly regret not being able to see it!" (Root) The woman thought that he was alone, but seeing the person standing, she soon apologized and turned speechless.

And the woman that was at the depths of the room, had a wide smile as she herself walked towards the place where Grount is.

"You, Shen?! Eh, but I feel like you are slightly different..." (Grount) "I am Shen-ja yo. No, I was Shen would be a more appropriate way to put it. I have tied a ruling pact with a certain person you see. Right now I am faithfully serving him as a servant of his." (Tomoe) "Pact? A...ruling one?" (Grount)

Grount wasn't thinking when talking, it was as if she were returning answers inorganically like a parrot.

"Yeah. That's why, I go by the name Tomoe. I recently went to the Empire you know. Together with my master." (Tomoe) "Ara. If you had visited, I would have brought out tea. Don't act so distant. But well, I was a bit busy myself so it can't be helped huh. I am sorry for not offering any reception. Even though you went out of your way to walk out of the wasteland." (Grount) Experiencing an unexpected reunion with an old friend dragon, the woman -Superior Dragon Sand Wave, named Grount-

greets Tomoe.

As one would expect, she still doesn't understand the situation.

"Kuku, and so Grount, you had some business with me, right?" (Root) Root sits at an opposite sofa from Tomoe and looks at the still standing Grount.

"!! That's right, Root! What's with that hyuman?! It was Lancer's egg, the egg of a superior dragon, you know?! And to entrust it to something like a hyuman!!" (Grount) "But he was strong, right?" (Root)

"W-Well that is..." (Grount)

"As expected, stronger than me?" (Root)

"At the very least, I felt more despair compared to the time when I was fighting you." (Grount) "Hah...so it was huh. That hurts. A fellow superior dragon is telling me in this way after all. Just what in the world is Makoto-kun trying to become?" (Root) Root throws his back towards the sofa and looks at the ceiling.

Contrary to his words, he looked quite happy.

"Makoto? No, he said his name was Raidou though." (Grount)

"Yeah, whichever is fine. Makoto-kun is Raidou after all. Well, you know, it is that; he has two names just like us. Don't mind it." (Root) "Is that so...then... like hell I will swallow that answer! I will have you explain it properly! About that ultima weapon-like hyuman, the reason why Lancer has turned into an egg, and the reason why I have to look after Lancer!!" (Grount) "... But you know Tomoe, it is incredible huh. There's this many superior dragons gathered in one room of the Adventurer Guild. This is a little like a summit, don't you think? Summit 5?" (Root) Grount has an incredibly threatening attitude beside Tomoe. Sitting right in front of Root, she draws closer to him.

But Root cooly washed away that stern expression of hers and throws the conversation to Tomoe.

"There's only the 3 of us in the room though." (Tomoe)

“How sad. If Grount had brought Lancer, it would have been 6.” (Root) “Even if you continue piling up words that are not getting through, there would be no point.” (Tomoe) “For us who gather rarely, this is quite the event though…” (Root) “Root!! Just what in the world are you saying!! I won’t be deceived!!” (Grount) Grount’s threatening attitude didn’t stop.

“I know. You are talking about Lancer, right? I will be explaining it now geez. See, here.” (Root) “… Hah?” (Grount)

Root takes out two eggs from who knows where and puts them on the table.

Grount’s eyes open wide.

Because she understood what those eggs were.

“This one is Night Clad, and this one here is Waterfall. And so, it is regretful. Aside from us, all the other superior dragons have been hunted down~!!” (Root) “… Uhm, eh?” (Grount)

“At first it was the Famed Sword, Lancer. The next would be Waterfall, and the one after was Night Clad. Crimson Red was the last one. Went around killing them all you see.” (Root) “I didn’t hear any of this you know?” (Grount)

“The superior dragons were being targeted, so don’t you think the person responsible had done the necessary to prevent it from getting out?” (Root) “!!! Don’t tell me, that hyuman was the one who did it?!” (Grount) “Heh. Ah, that’s wrong. He is the one who settled the problem. He defeated the offender. And so they became eggs. About Lancer, he doesn’t have anyone to take care of it, so I thought of leaving him to you. That’s why I requested Makoto-kun to do the errand.” (Root) “… Just who in the world was the one responsible?” (Grount)

“It is embarrassing to say but, the one responsible was a mixed breed of a hyuman and dragon that superbly inherited my blood. You see, it went absorbing the power of the defeated dragons and had become quite the crazy issue. Even the Empire’s hero-kun was at the verge of dying. Ah~, I’m truly sorry.” (Root) “The Empire’s hero. Ah, the charm one. Because that thing was there, I returned to my younger self and was thinking of

being absent from the Empire for a while." (Grount) Grount was showing a suffering expression as if holding in a headache.

"We are in this state of situation, so do spare me from doing that. After things have calmed down, you can do it. In your case, you are able to reincarnate with your memories intact after all. That technique, I would really like you to teach it to me." (Root) "It is unnecessary for you who can live by without reincarnating, right? And so?" (Grount) "And so, what?" (Root)

"That hyuman, just how did he defeat a monster that had devoured the power of 4 superior dragons? You cooperated as well, right?" (Grount) "Hm, it was a straight battle of power. Regarding me, it was like, I gave the last hit? Thanks to that, I ended up in a variety of circumstances with him though. Well, he is a boy that is fun to get involved with, so I don't really mind." (Root) The eyes of Grount are wide open once again.

Her mouth was also wide open as if her jaw had dislocated.

Tomoe who was silent, was covering her mouth and trying to hold down her laughter.

"... Root, just how long are you going to keep joking around? From what point should I begin to seriously listen?" (Grount) "How rude. The only joke I made was the message I gave to Makoto-kun, but everything else I spoke seriously." (Root) "Message?"

"Yeah. I told him that at the Empire there's my Oba-san dragon by the name of Grount, so please bring the egg of Lancer to her." (Root) "So it really was your doiiiing!!!" (Grount)

With a speed akin to instant movement, Grount puts one leg on the table and grabs the collar of Root, lifts it, and shakes it violently back and forth.

It is the most movement they have had today.

"Wai-, ugah, calm...down!!" (Root)

"Like hell I can be calm!! This is the first time I have tasted such a despairing experience you know?! My blaze couldn't even make his

clothes flutter; when my spell hit him, it wouldn't reach and would be cancelled! My nails and fangs as well, no matter how many times I hit him, he shook his head apologetically!!" (Grount) "Acha~. That magic armor has that much strength huh. Moreover, it seems to have stabilized quite a bit. How scary." (Root) "It is not on the level of scary! At the end, my nails were cracked and hurt a lot you know?! See here!!" (Grount) While hanging Root with one hand, Grount stretches her right hand before Root's eyes.

Her fingers were beautiful, but just like she said, her nails were grandly cracked and were in a hurting state that people would frown when looking at it.

"You didn't have them healed?" (Tomoe)

Tomoe asks Grount as she sips her tea.

"He did ask me if I wanted it healed. But... there's no way I would just go: 'Okay, please', right?! Spreading blood lust, throwing out attacks, and when I was tired, I got artlessly grabbed and thrown away; he said that right after!!! It took me my whole to say: 'Don't look down on me, what's your business?', you know?!" (Grount) "I see. For a crushed dragon like you, Waka was unable to say anymore huh." (Tomoe) "I also have my pride as a superior dragon... Waka?" (Grount)

Grount who has been responding to Tomoe without facing her, at this moment for the first time, she turned her face towards the back where Tomoe is.

"Yeah, I told you that I was at the Empire, right? Along with my master." (Tomoe) "Yeah." (Grount)

"My master's name is Raidou-ja." (Tomoe)

The air in the area froze.

The one who was creating a noisy atmosphere was Grount, and the person herself had frozen in place.

"... What did you say?" (Grount)

“Didn’t I say it already? That I had made a ruling pact with a hyuman. That person was Raidou, or Makoto-sama to put it in another way. My master-ja.” (Tomoe) “A ruling...pact. You did say it before... EEEEHH?! You made a ruling pact... with a HYUMAN?!” (Grount) “Just how long do you take to get it? Are you aiming to become an actress or something?” (Tomoe) “Eh, but Tomoe, a superior dragon and a hyuman... ruling; and that’s with that boy, Raidou?” (Grount) “That’s right-ja. Oh, don’t put down Root. Keep him like that-ja.” (Tomoe) Tomoe stops Grount who had lost the strength in her arm that was holding Root because of her absentminded state.

“Eh, why are you saying something like that, Tomoe? Wasn’t the talk heading to drinking all together after a long awaited reunion between superior dragons? If I remember correctly, you have a delicious Sake that you made.” (Root) Root felt an air of turbulence stroking his cheek.

He timidly confirms with Tomoe.

“Of course, there’s no lie in that. But you see...” (Tomoe)

Tomoe faces Root who was across Grount, and continues speaking with eyes holding a sharp light different from any before.

“Before the drinking bout, I have something I want to ask. Well, I have already gotten a confession though. How dare you set up Waka to say the taboo word at Grount. Moreover, in a misunderstanding where he would most likely say it repeatedly.” (Tomoe) “N-No well, that’s you see... I was 100% sure that Makoto-kun wouldn’t go for the kill, and I also knew that Grount wouldn’t be able to kill him, so... see? When thinking about it properly, don’t you think that the best way to understand Makoto-kun is after exchanging fists with him?” (Root) “... Because of that, I suffered quite a wound in my heart though?” (Grount) “G-Grount, let’s calm down. 1vs2 isn’t something a superior dragon should do. Don’t you think so?” (Root) “Be at ease, Grount. At the drinking bout later, I will have you heal that wound with the best Sake. That’s why right now... you understand-ja na?” (Tomoe) Root and Tomoe face Grount and speak to her.

“Understood. Right now your name is Tomoe, right? We have to talk for

a bit to this idiot with bad taste, isn't it?" (Grount) "Umu. Of course, a talk with fists, that is." (Tomoe)

"Yes, with fists. In good time. After this finishes, I will get treatment for my nails." (Grount) "Tomoe, from the beginning you came here with those intentions, weren't you?!" (Root) "You have went a bit out of boundaries, Root. It is still long till night. It is a nice time to take a break!!" (Tomoe) "I will have you learn how scared I was!!" (Grount)

"Wai-?! Today I seriously have work piled u—- agaaaaaa" (Root)

That night, the two dragon princesses were moistening their throats to their heart's content with the japanese Sake.

Excluding one of them who had his wounds sting.

Chapter 184: Welcoming and Audience

Parade.

There really was one.

With an open carriage that was ornamented in a conspicuous way to the level of a portable shrine in festivals, it carried us from the gate to the castle.

Since coming to this world, this has been the most embarrassment I've had.

It made me think that there's no other day I wanted to bring my mask as much it did today.

At the front, Io slowly advanced on his black horse-like ride; at our side, there's Rona.

Well these guys are in their own country, and their position is that of a demon general, so they are probably used to this kind of treatment.

But I was a normal citizen in Japan, and in this world I am a merchant, so being immediately able to cope with this type of event is impossible.

I was somehow able to return my stiffened face to normal, but I was unable to reach an understanding or free myself from obstructive thoughts.

What surprised me was Mio and Shiki.

Mio had an unconcerned face as if nothing's happening, and Shiki was smilingly responding to the welcoming words thrown at him and was waving his hand.

Incredible.

These two are honestly impressive.

Also, I don't know if this is the sense of worth for the demon race, or that's just their valuation of hyumans, but it felt fresh.

As soon as the parade began, obviously, the gaze of the blue crowd that

was lined up at both sides of the wide street were gathered at us.

I had shrunk the magic armor to a point that can't be seen, and my magic power itself is in a state where other people would find it hard to notice.

Because of that, I who was the main guest, was looked at with puzzled eyes; at Mio with curiosity; and at Shiki, they simply let out their breath.

From three of us, the one who was showing the most power to the outside was Shiki.

Not much later, eyes of respect were also directed at Mio.

Glittering eyes were directed at her.

Not long after, cheers were also poured at me.

Even though I am barefaced.

For the demon race, the appearance is secondary. I understood that here they evaluate people by their power.

Because they are demons, they have blue skin and have horns on their head, but just as expected from the people created by the Goddess, they all have nice looking features.

I don't know what kind of introduction they did to us, but being welcomed by a group of beauties feels uncomfortable.

"Fufufu, they really did it. Last night's reception in the village was truly exaggerated as well, but I didn't expect that they would go through so much effort." (Shiki) We enter a towering castle, and were led into a spacious room.

Shiki, this is not something to laugh about.

Here I am, unable to stop sighing because of the mental fatigue.

If I let my guard down, a deep sigh would leak out from the depths of my stomach.

Even if Mio confirmed me that there's no tapping and spying set up in this room, my rapid fire sighs were not stopping.

How deplorable.

“There were a number of stores that seemed delicious-looking. I will check them out later.” (Mio) Now that she mentions it, the kebab-looking one looked good.

Wait, that’s not it.

Is it okay to go outside? That’s the first thing that should be answered, Mio.

Fuh...

“Outside huh. I will ask later and see if we can step out, Mio. And so, as expected, the reception at last night’s village was also a plan from them, Shiki?” (Makoto) I ask for confirmation of Shiki.

It is certainly true that for a town that has been enduring blizzard and existing, they gave us a warm welcome.

I thought that it might be because people related to the Demon Lord and the Demon Generals had come, but is there some sort of underlying reason?

The most I thought was: ‘The Demon Lord is also giving orders to the towns’.

“Of course. ‘Even in unexpected places, the demon race is a monolith, and the Demon Lord also has good reputation’, is most likely what they were trying to appeal. The parade is also a part of it. They probably thought that a welcoming was obvious for guests of the Demon Lord, and they must have wanted to show the trust they have for their own lord.” (Shiki) “Are you trying to say that this appeal is another word for political pressure?” (Makoto) “No. The Demon Lord is without doubt doing a good government for the demons-no- the demi-humans as a whole. This capital is without doubt the place with most demons, but the sight of demi-humans wasn’t rare, right? In the citizens that were welcoming us, they were naturally mixed in.” (Shiki) “Ah, that’s true. In that case, there’s no need to make an appeal. We would be able to tell just by looking around normally.” (Makoto) “...They wanted us to understand the

demon race in the short time of our stay, is most likely what they were trying to achieve. If it were people that only had good points... it would have been easier though." (Shiki) "Eh, is there anything troublesome coming?" (Makoto)

Seeing the words of Shiki stalling, I felt a sense of foreboding.

"No. It seems like for the demon race side, they are properly trying to grasp Waka-sama. At this rate, they will probably not try a scheme of separating us. Of course, I will be keeping an eye and providing support." (Shiki) "Yeah, do your best Shiki. I will leave that part to you." (Mio)

... Mio.

If you are leaving that to him, just what do you intend to do.

"I will leave the protection of Waka-sama and recklessness display to Mio-dono. I am counting on you. If I don't have to fling my power as Larva, they will probably slightly understand the depths of our power after all." (Shiki) "... You two, I am counting on you, okay?" (Makoto)

It seems like Mio does have intentions to work.

For now I am relieved.

Ah, I kinda feel nervous now.

At Rotsgard, when I met with the high-standing people of countries, it was an emergency situation, so I remember that I wasn't that nervous.

Being welcomed in this kind of way and even putting on a parade, well, it was to be expected.

At the Empire, before I could get nervous, there were a lot of events going on, and Tomoki served as a good stress relieve. Well, he made it possible for me to use him that way.

Knock

Uo, it's here.

"Excuse my intrusion. The representative of Kuzunoha Company, Raidou Misumi-sama. The preparations for the audience have been

finished.”

A serene voice.

The lively words increased my nervousness.

Deep breath~, deep breath~.

“Ah, yes! I will go soon!” (Makoto)

Shiki opened the door and leaves to the corridor.

Two armed soldiers were there and two demons with a nice personal appearance.

There are 4 people coming to guide me?

No, but the two others are not armed. Did civil officials come as well?

They must have noticed me staring unconsciously, the two lowered their head.

But they don’t say anything.

The two had a difference in height like that of Akua and Eris.

The tall one is a man with indigo blue short hair and a fine goat-like horn.

In terms of age, he is obviously older than me, but I think he is young. Maybe in his mid-twenties?

His demeanor is soft and has a gentle smile on his face.

The other one is a small woman.

Or more like, little girl.

Long straight blonde hair, and a still small horn.

Her mouth looks like it is smiling, but her eyes were showing a light as if inspecting me.

... At least it is better than the scheming eyes of Eris.

Hmph, well, there should be an explanation later.

Even though they have come to tell me that the audience preparations

have been done, it would be rude to keep talking here. As Shiki said, it seems like the demon race won't be coming with any foul plays, so let's just be obedient.

This may be common etiquette of the demon race.

"Then we will be guiding you."

"Please do." (Makoto)

One of the armed soldiers measured the timing and talks to me.

I nod.

Right now it is without doubt noon, and yet, we are walking the corridor with lit lights.

It is always night here after all.

A capital of everlasting night does sound kinda cool.

The people that were walking the opposite direction, no matter their appearance, they all shifted to the sides and lowered their heads as they saw us off.

Yeah, it does feel itchy.

But that time didn't continue for long.

We arrived at a big door that felt like a gate.

There were two robust soldiers... no, maybe knights, with a clear difference in hair color that were standing at both sides of the door.

The two that were silently walking behind until now went along with the two soldiers and approached the door. They seem to be talking about something.

As expected, the two with good personal appearance are probably from a higher standing.

While I was thinking that, the big door opens.

I was bask by a faint light, so maybe it has some sort of magic imbued.

From the door that opened without making a sound, I could see a red

carpet spread out.

Oh, it truly looks like an audience room.

Being urged to go in, I thought this before going into the room.

Maybe there's some sort of etiquette here.

"Uhm, can you please tell me if there's some sort of custom I am required to do?" (Makoto) I approach the smiling man that has an easy to talk atmosphere, and quietly ask him.

"It is okay to just act as you normally do. It is a given that you don't know the etiquette of the demon race. If Raidou-sama holds respect for our Lord, then it is enough if you just show it in your own way."

"I-I see. Understood." (Makoto)

'If you don't know, it is fine even if you are lacking in manners', is what he is trying to say, right?

Okay.

Let's go.

Resolving myself, I face forward.

The man that gave me an explanation and the girl that came along with him were standing at both sides of the red carpet that I advanced in.

Are they people that will be participating in the audience?

If there's people like that, it would make me feel better.

I continue straight through the red carpet.

Mio and Shiki were following a few steps behind.

After the red carpet, there's a stairway, and after that there's the throne.

I can see that there's someone there.

... Or more like, standing.

It is not sitting on the throne?

No no no, not only that, it is walking down the stairs?!

Eh?!

Is the Lord of the demon race supposed to do something like that?

No good, don't fall in chaos.

This might be a plan from them as well.

I was about to walk in quick steps, but I was somehow able to maintain my speed.

If I continue on, someone will probably notify me of where is the point I should stop.

I walk in a calm pace.

I'm totally at my wits end inside my head though.

The person that's probably the Demon Lord doesn't stop its feet and continues going down the stairs.

The distance steadily shortens.

This is unexpected, really unexpected.

Being bewildered in this occasion can't be helped.

I should at least try not to stutter. Yeah, let's do that.

Subordinates, stop that person!

Your Lord and a stranger merchant will end up talking at close range, you know?

Isn't that bad?

But my internal screams ended unanswered.

My legs stop.

Because I can't advance further.

Right in front of me, there's the Demon Lord.

Wearing a luxurious cloak that covered all sides of its body.

The height of my gaze would be staring right at his chest, so the first

impression that came out was his cloak.

Looking up at the Lord of the demon race who is standing straight, I look at his face closely.

And so, he was younger than what I thought.

It is an appearance that would make me question if he has already turned 40.

As a man, he looks like the age where he has passed the difficult period.

His short blonde tortoise shell cut hair was lifted up in order to avoid having it on his horn. At around the top of his ears, there's two thick curved horns like those of a goat.

Our eyes met and we both look at each other.

He is the Lord. I could tell that in one glance.

What an incredible presence.

If we fight, I will probably win.

But, how to say it. Right, he is a man that I can't beat at anything else aside from that, is what I thought.

It is not a sharpness that shoots through, but eyes that seem to envelop you.

His face had turned into a wide smile.

But that wasn't a sensation of closeness, it was something that made him feel even bigger. I felt overawed by it.

Noticing my legs that were about to step back, I stop them.

Then, I noticed. The hand stretched out from the Demon Lord.

I thought that he was asking for a handshake, so I reflexively put out my right hand, and just as expected, he grabbed it.

With relatively high strength.

"I'm glad you have come. Welcome to the capital of the demon race, Raidou-dono. This one is the Lord of the demons, in the outside, the

people call this one, Demon Lord. My name is long and troublesome, so it is fine for Raidou-dono to just remember this one as Zef." (Zef) With a clear voice, the Demon Lord speaks.

"Zef-sama. I am Raidou Misumi. A merchant running a business called Kuzunoha Company." (Makoto) Eh, I didn't say anything strange, right?

I should be fine, right?

"Umu, this one is truly sorry for having you walk through such a tough route. We are in the middle of a war, so please forgive us. In exchange, at the time you are here, this one promises you that you will not face any discomfort. Along with the rudeness of this one's subordinates, I will have them atone for it plenty." (Zef) "I thank you for the grateful words. Just that, the case with the Demon Generals was a misfortune in war and being at cross purposes. Please don't think about atonement." (Makoto) "A misfortune brought in war huh. You will think of it that way. This one is truly grateful. But about the entertainment, it is something obvious to do for our guests. This one wants you to enjoy yourself. And so, are those two there Raidou-dono's subordinates? People from your company?" (Zef) "Ah, sorry! The man is called Shiki, and the woman is Mio. The both of them are followers that are helping me out a lot." (Makoto) With my words, Mio and Shiki lift their lowered heads and do a bow.

"My name's Shiki. One of the Kuzunoha Company members that has come together with master." (Shiki) "Same, Mio-desu." (Mio)

"Hoh~. The two of you seem to be really strong. This one is jealous of Raidou-dono. No, saying something like being jealous would be rude huh. Raidou-dono must possess quite the power as well. Then it is natural that these two would serve under you. It was this one's mistake, please do forgive this one." (Zef) "I am always being helped out by them anyways." (Makoto)

"My apologies. But it is regrettable that this one can't even measure your strength. If you are hiding it, that means you have enough ability to even hide it from this one. It seems that inviting Kuzunoha Company was fortuitous for us demon race." (Zef) "Those words are wasted on me."

(Makoto)

“Fufufu. An audience that would stiffen one’s shoulders would be tiring for Raidou-dono, right? Then let’s change locations and do some leisure talk.” (Zef) ?!!!

It’s still not over?!

“Understood. Do you mind having my followers accompanying us as well?”

“Of course this one doesn’t. Your companions can also come. Right, this one is thinking about having a few of my relatives, children of mine, accompany us. It is a good chance for them to have a conversation with a hyuman, moreover, a merchant at that. Is it okay?” (Zef) “Children huh. I don’t mind.” (Makoto)

The children of the Demon Lord. Then does that mean the prince and princess?

Now that I think about it, the princess Lily from Gritonia, prince Yoshua from Limia; I have quite a good amount of prince and princess’ as acquaintances.

It makes me actually feel that me and my company are strangely famous.

“Then let’s go.” (Zef)

“... Zef-sama will guide us himself?!” (Makoto)

My tone reflexively comes out strong.

“Don’t worry, it is just around the corner. Ah, you haven’t placed anything in your stomach since coming to the capital, right? About that, this one will have it prepared.” (Zef) Zef-san glances at Mio?

He looked at Mio.

It is not like she is dissatisfied because of hunger.

It even seems like she is slightly happy to hear that we will be eating something.

Waving his cloak, Zef-san walks towards the door we had entered from.

I follow the Lord.

It would obviously be bad to be left behind.

With a speed that doesn't turn into running, I hurriedly follow after him.

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"Now then, the Kuzunoha Company is an interesting bunch. What do you guys think?"

A room that's used for meetings.

At the big table there's plates, and light meals that can be taken with the hand were being brought to it.

Beginning with the Demon Lord, the demons that were in that place also had food still on their plates, but the three plates at the empty seats were still on the table and its contents had been cleanly finished.

This is after the conversation with Raidou, Mio and Shiki had finished.

The situation in the room was proof of this.

"...A beast that devours meat, no matter how docile it tries to be, there won't be any assurance that it won't attack. That's the impression I had of Kuzunoha Company."

The first one to respond to the Demon Lord's words was one of the demons that went to receive Raidou; the tall man.

"Roshe huh. Fumu, then if it's you, how would you associate with Raidou and the Kuzunoha Company?" (Zef) "From their words, obtaining true cooperation from them is impossible. But there's no need to go out of our way to awaken the sleeping danger. We will have a connection when necessary, and in the future, I think that it would be appropriate to act in a way that we don't end up facing front to front with them. Fortunately, it seemed like they didn't have any intentions of providing man power to the hyumans." (Roshe) "So cooperation will be impossible huh. It is certainly true that it will be difficult. They clearly stated that they won't take any

powers as allies. Even if any of the sides does an action that benefits the other, it will be an action that directly relates to their benefit and not with the intentions of being hostile with anyone." (Zef) Roshe nods at the words of the Lord.

"Those words of Raidou sounded very dangerous to me. In this war that has our fate at stake, they will only participate in the war with their benefit at foremost. That's how it sounded to me." (Rushia) "Rushia, are you saying that the Kuzunoha Company will become a third power?"

The next one to speak was a woman.

A different female from the girl that had come to receive Raidou. A woman with a calm atmosphere around her.

Looking straight at the Demon Lord, the light in her eyes didn't waver.

From this group, she is the only one wearing armor even if it's lightweight, which made her stand out.

"... Right now I wouldn't go so far as to say that. But it is like having a sword hanging on our heads. An unrestful sensation." (Rushia) "... The words of Raidou: 'If there's hostility, we will deliver retribution', is the part that you are worried about?" (Zef) "Yes. Raidou said that if anything is tried against his friends, he wouldn't forgive it. In a clear manner." (Rushia) "This one thinks that those words of his had another way of taking it. Most likely its foundation is that he won't be showing hostility to anyone himself; is what he intended to mean when saying it." (Zef) "But just like what your Majesty has said, Raidou made an allusion that there's a chance they might do something that could antagonize us. Moreover, adding the intention of having us overlook it." (Rushia) "Fumu, those words, this one doesn't think they were said with the intentions that you have stated, Rushia. There's certainly a few words from Raidou that gave out a doubtful feeling though." (Zef) "As long as Raidou and the Kuzunoha Company doesn't properly state their position, without stating if they are black or white, I am against being intimate with them." (Rushia) "This one properly understands your view now. Sem, how do you view it?" (Zef) Listening to the last words of Rushia, the Demon Lord

shifts the conversation to the man that was silently listening to the conversation.

A demon with long silver hair tied in a bundle and wearing glasses.

It is also the demon that secretly felt closeness to Raidou because he felt like they were glass comrades.

Although the Raidou in question had already taken them off since the matter at the wasteland though.

Opening his narrow eyes, the man called Sem speaks.

“I have a similar opinion to big brother, but I thought that it would be better to have a deeper connection with them.” (Sem) “Hoh~. That’s quite different from Rushia.” (Zef)

Sem looks at Rushia.

She didn’t show an displeased expression after hearing the opinion of him which is practically the complete opposite of hers. She just closed her eyes and silently took her seat.

“We have different standings by nature. If I was in the same position as Rushia who thinks of the national defense as foremost, I would have had the same opinion as her.” (Sem) “You who are in the position of diplomacy, has a different opinion, right? Let’s hear it.” (Zef) “Yes. Sadly, Raidou-dono didn’t answer much of the questions I asked and it was mostly Shiki-dono who did, but I think this is the opinion of the Kuzunoha Company. First of all, they possess a transportation ability that surpasses us by lengths and bounds.” (Sem) “... What’s your basis?” (Zef)

“They have experienced the harsh travelling in the demon race territory. But well, even in the demon race territory it was one of the most harshest of the places though. Our territory has increased quite a bit after all.” (Sem) “Sem, that’s not answering anything.” (Zef)

“Oh, I am sorry. I unconsciously lengthened it. It was my bad habit. In other words, they have experienced that level of travelling, and yet, if for example I asked something like: ‘We need these type of things prepared, would you be able to bring them?’ Shiki-dono would normally nod, and its

price was truly reasonable. It was a price that was purely placed to obtain profit from the cost of production." (Sem) "...Continue." (Zef)

"Yes. In other words, it didn't take much into consideration the expenses that would come from travelling in these lands. The warranty for the danger should make the price even higher or it would be strange. Moreover, they were talking as if they didn't have any problems with bringing fruits, vegetables and meat. This is something that Raidou-dono said though." (Sem) "That's why you think the Kuzunoha Company has some sort of method to certainly deliver the goods, moreover, in a way that doesn't entail any danger?" (Zef) "That's how it can be taken. If there's a company that's able to transport the goods from faraway without any damage in the goods, their worth would be unmeasurable. There would be no other foreign trade partner as beneficial as this. The problem would be if our market would appeal to their interest though. I don't think it will be that much of a problem since he is a hyuman and the specialties of the demon race territory have a rare value. Of course, thinking of the possibility that those goods might be sold to other hyumans, I think it would be best to not trade anything that's related to our classified information." (Sem) "Then your opinion is that: 'As a partner that can help enrich the demon race, it would be best to hold a connection with them'?" (Zef) "Yes. We are beginning to realize a wealthy country for us demons and the demi-humans that have decided to coexist with us. But the territory that has become bigger now, still has slow movement in goods. If we create a good business connection with the Kuzunoha Company, it would become a big help to the goods distribution in our territory. If put in an example, it would be like having blood flowing better through the veins." (Sem) "So you are saying that the current demon race doesn't have its blood flowing all the way huh." (Zef) The words of the Demon Lord had a tone of self-blame.

"Fast development will always create bents in places. It is only because I am lacking in skills. Normally, we shouldn't be relying on external sources, but even so, I have judged that our current demon race requires their existence." (Sem) This is what Sem declares.

For Sem, the Kuzunoha Company might have looked like the hand of salvation.

“Understood. This one will use it as reference. Now then, the remaining one is Sari huh. This one thought that you would be the first one to state your opinion though. The first one that wished to come along was you after all.” (Zef) “...”

“Seeing the Kuzunoha Company and speaking with them; this one wants you to tell me what you felt about it.” (Zef) “...Yes” (Sari)

The last one the Lord shifted the conversation to was a little girl.

One of the people that came to escort Raidou.

She had a face as if meditating something in a deep, really deep manner.

Doing a short reply, Sari moves aside the hand that was at her mouth and lifts up her head.

“Those people... no, more accurately speaking, Raidou is incredibly dangerous.” (Sari) “... Fumu.” (Zef)

The same direction as Rushia’s opinion huh, is what the Demon Lord thought.

For someone that had interest in them, she had stopped to a quite normal viewpoint, is also the unexpected feeling he had of Sari.

She continues.

“My ally by nature is the analysis of information, but after being face to face with these people, I will be speaking with a bit of instinct mixed in as well.” (Sari) “This one doesn’t mind. What did you feel?” (Zef)

“Trackless power. Moreover, at an overwhelming extent.” (Sari)

Hearing the abstract words of Sari, all the people present narrow their eyes.

“You are saying quite the abstract words there. That’s rare, Sari.” (Zef) “I am sorry, your Majesty. But if I am to put it together, that’s the result

that comes out. As an existence of power, the Kuzunoha Company is certainly not an existence we can ignore. In that aspect, I am of the same opinion as Ani-sama and the others." (Sari) <Ani=Older brother> Roshe, Sem, Rushia; the three of them nod at the words of Sari.

"Just like in the report of Rona, they are appealing. For us, they are incredibly appealing, moreover, strong. Conversely, that is also incredibly dangerous and an existence that can jeopardize the demon race. What I mean is that, uhm, I can't properly bring it out in words. For all that power they have, they are way too much of an unstable factor, is how I thought of it." (Sari) "Unstable?" (Zef)

"If I am to force myself to put my personal opinion into words, then yeah, that's how it is. Unstable, moreover, an unstable factor that we don't know its limits of. Raidou said he won't cooperate with anyone in the war, he won't be taking sides. That is just like Rushia ane-sama said, having a sword hanging over our heads. But just as Sem ani-sama said, that power could be the wonder medicine that might solve many of the problems the demon race has." (Sari) "Then wouldn't it end up the same as Roshe's opinion? Thinking of the risks while having a connection with them." (Zef) "...I am concerned about what's further beyond that." (Sari)

"Beyond?" (Zef)

"I illustrated Raidou as a power that can't be kept in check. In other words, the time when Raidou suddenly turns to face us." (Sari) "Acting in a way to make sure it doesn't happen, won't work?" (Zef) "We don't know how something that can't be kept in check will move. If in the middle of our war with the hyumans, we end up instilling his rage in a moment we don't know of, he would most likely not hesitate in baring his fangs towards the demon race. Let me ask you, your Majesty. Your Majesty, can we defeat Kuzunoha Company?" (Sari) The words of Sari make the air in the area colder.

Words that could be taken as rude.

But the Demon Lord, after a moment of silence, looks straight at Sari without signs of faltering in his voice.

"...Don't know. But probably..." (Zef)

"Probably?" (Sari)

"We won't win. The best we could do is most likely to put our efforts in not losing. After all, Io and Rona who are our prided demon generals, couldn't be his opponents even when fighting at the same time. And in reality, Io was dealt with in his spare time, eliminating him from the battlefield. His close aides as well as his employees, they are surely not normal either." (Zef) "?!!"

"..."

Aside from Sari, the eyes of the other three opened wide at the words of the Demon Lord.

Sari took those words in silence.

"So you see them as a power that can't be kept in check huh. As a commentary describing Raidou, it might be the most appropriate. This one's opinion is that he is a sleeping dragon. It might be a poor plan to just try not waking it up huh." (Zef) "He needs a choker. Also, it can't be just any choker. There's the need for a choker with the seed called demon race which will double as an insurance as well." (Sari) "A choker even when we can't keep it in check?" (Zef)

"Yes. Fortunately, I don't think there's an existence that is guiding his will yet. At the very least, he is not a talent that we can let the hyumans have. This timing is truly fortunate. I think that there's worth in trying." (Sari) "So we will be making Raidou into our lap dog? It is an opinion quite different from the other three." (Zef) "No. We will do our best to lead him into not biting the demon race, is probably the best result. He will most likely not be tamed." (Sari) "Fu... hahahaha!! You have seen through Raidou to this extent and yet, you still say that? Well, they are still staying in the capital. In that case, there's no need be so pessimistic. It may not be a long stay by any means, but... there's still time." (Zef) "... Yes. Just that, looking at the information of him until now, Raidou didn't show strong any strong will to have a relation of cooperation or minded about his own standing. I don't know what happened in this short time,

but if something did happen, I can't go without resenting that reason. If he were in a more normal state, it would have been easier to handle." (Sari) "That unyielding attitude was also unexpected for this one. Was he like that from the very beginning, or did he have a change of heart, there might have been someone who did something unnecessary. What a troublesome thing they have done. Now then, let's finish this up. It was worthwhile to hear all your opinions without reserve. You can leave now." (Zef) The Demon Lord wraps up the conversation.

The four demons leave the room, and the Demon Lord Zef was the only one left in the room.

"...Fuh, they have become reliable. If the Kuzunoha Company didn't exist, this one wouldn't have minded retiring even now. As expected, it is all because of Raidou and the Kuzunoha Company huh. This one doesn't think the meeting point at Kaleneon's area was a coincidence. It seems there's still more surprises for us. It is truly good timing that we were able to make contact with him before he joined any of the heroes." (Zef) After words akin to a whisper, the happy expression of the Demon Lord made a complete change. From a Lord, he had turned into an individual called Zef.

"Raidou... how long has it been since this one has felt cold sweat. To have power that even this one can't measure. At the very least he is stronger than a spirit. Not only a hero, his power might be close to that of a God." (Zef) A line of sweat runs down his cheek.

Zef didn't move for a while in his room.

Chapter 185: The Lapis Lazuli Volcano

"And so, it is now free time. We have easily received permission to go outside so, what should we do?" (Makoto) Finishing the extremely tiring audience with the Demon Lord, we return to the room prepared for us and take a break.

I look at Mio and Shiki.

Well~ that was impressive.

It was truly the Demon Lord-sama.

The four children of his had a smiling atmosphere and were throwing me conversation topics, but I felt like they were looking at more than just my answers.

But it wasn't as if we were faced with a one-sided barrage of questions, they also readily answered our questions, so I managed to get the permission to walk outdoors without having any bodyguards or surveillance.

"For me, I was thinking about having a small talk with Rona." (Shiki) "With Rona? Ah, right. Rona is an old acquaintance of yours, right Shiki?" (Makoto) "Yeah, but well, it is not like I am going to warm up my old friendship though. It seems like she is being overly cautious of us you see. There's still time for the banquet, so I will be going to solve that 'misunderstanding'. She most likely already knows about the contents of our audience from the Demon Lord himself, but if that's the case, it is better to act fast." (Shiki) Misunderstanding?

Hm, did Rona do something to make him cautious?

I don't think she did anything special though.

Maybe it is just that she has the eyes of someone that might do something.

"... I see. Then you won't be leaving the city, right?" (Makoto) "Yes. That, I will do later." (Shiki)

“And Mio?” (Makoto)

“I will immediately head to check the city. There were a number of places that looks interesting after all.” (Mio) The bouncy words of Mio.

I thought that she had an unconcerned expression at the parade, but she was casually checking the surroundings. That’s impressive.

It makes me remember the words used to calm the nervousness of actors: ‘Think of the audience as if they are potatoes’, or something like that.

To Mio, the gazes and cheers of all those demons and demi-humans were akin to potatoes.

...No, potatoes are food, so maybe she considers them even lower than that?

No matter which, it is a bold spirit I would like to learn from.

At our visit to the Empire, Mio was looking after Asora in place of Tomoe, but this time, she was stubborn about going together with us.

‘Tomoe went last time, so this time you are staying’, is the logic she was using.

‘Is she a child?’, is what I thought.

Since returning from the Empire, Tomoe has been in a good mood, and without a single objection to Mio’s words, she readily consented to house-sitting.

Well, she did say that she had something to do, so she probably didn’t have any intentions of accompanying us anyways.

For me, Shiki is actually the one that pains me to have him accompany me two times in a row.

But he is the one that I can be the most at ease with when coming with me, so I unconsciously end up relying on him.

If I had only left Shiki behind, I think that it would have been possible to continue the classes in Rotsgard without having to cancel it.

I will have to reflect on this.

“An eating trip huh. At night we will be having a banquet, so try not eating too much, okay? Also, I didn’t hear anything about their side putting out bodyguards, but even if someone is following you, try to refrain from doing anything unreasonable.” (Makoto) “Yes, I know. I will just give them a light tap, Waka-sama. But if you are worried, how about accompanying me?” (Mio) “Me? I want to go, but since I have the chance, I will be finishing the errand of Root first.” (Makoto) “Root’s... ah, the egg, was it?” (Mio)

Mio made a slight pondering gesture at the mention of Root, and it seems she remembered something, she clapped her hands together.

Yep, she is correct.

“Yeah, Crimson Red’s egg.” (Makoto)

“Right-desu wa. In that case, I will go together with you–” (Mio) “Ah, can’t do. It seems like it is close to a place that your past self has done something a long time ago. It wouldn’t be good if anything were to happen.” (Makoto) “My past self?” (Mio)

“Well, I will go quickly and finish. From what I heard in the audience, it is a place that only takes a few hours to reach.” (Makoto) “Indeed. They did say that it’s a few days to the north. Looking at it in the same way as the White Sand Sea, Waka-sama would be able to arrive in a few hours, and in the return, it would be enough to just use mist.” (Shiki) Shiki complements my words.

Maybe the demon side didn’t expect me to make a question about that place, they made a surprised face at my question.

If I mention the name of a place in the demon race territory, it would definitely be strange.

Root’s groundwork this time seems to be with the people that are directly related to the errand, and the demons weren’t really in the know of this.

Different from last time, there’s people who will take the guardian job,

so as long as I arrive there, the mission will be completed.

“Then there’s no helping it. It is regrettable, but I will be doing my best in obtaining new recipes-desu wa. Later, I will try searching for souvenirs to gift the residents of Asora.” (Mio) “That would be nice. Tell me about the nice stores later. About the things that might serve as souvenirs as well.” (Makoto) “Yes! I will do the eating tour.” (Mio)

“Well then, I am going.” (Makoto)

I open the window of the room and leave to the veranda.

The garden that can be seen below was emitting light making it look illusory, and it was really beautiful.

But I look moderately above.

At the pitch black sky.

“Have a safe trip. Come back soon.” (Shiki)

“Don’t catch a cold, okay?” (Mio)

While receiving the words of the two with my back, I jump from the veranda that was as big as a balcony.

I harden magic power in mid-air and use it as footholds to jump again.

Just like that, I soar up into the sky.

I leave the barrier that envelops the capital, and arrive at the outskirts where wind and snow rule over. Confirming the direction of my objective, I set up a marker at the distance.

I can’t see it with my eyes, but I can feel it.

With this, I won’t lose my way even in this blizzard.

In the room there’s already a mist gate to use for the return.

I just have to dispose of it when I return.

Now then, my objective is the snow field volcano.

It is without doubt a secluded region.

“Lapiz Lazuli Volcano huh. Will it be blue just like its name suggests? It

sounds like a beautiful place so it might be worth going to see." (Makoto) While holding slight expectations, I jumped into the blizzard.

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If I didn't have magic, I would have definitely gotten lost. I think this while I'm in this darkness filled snow storm.

The lights of the capital are already too far to be seen.

It must be as hellish of an environment as the White Desert.

There's differences in hot and cold, and the hot one was filled with traps while this one is more about the fury of nature though.

But Crimson Red is supposed to be the dragon that reigns over fire, and yet, why is it in such a cold place?

No well, it is a volcano, so maybe the place itself won't be cold though.

The outside is like this.

Thinking about Sofia's abilities, Crimson Red was probably a dragon that soared the sky and breathed out fire.

But the place I am in doesn't fit the image.

A dragon that shoots a heat ray like a laser. A dragon that could be considered the symbol of fantasy, moreover, a dragon that seemed to walk the path of the right.

Even if a laser is out of bounds, it is truly a Red Dragon.

I kinda want to see its figure when it was in all its splendor now.

I glance at the bag. Right now it is an egg.

Even if the growth of a dragon is quick, I will probably not be able to see it in the time I am alive.

That damn Sofia, she did something so wasteful.

"Oh, it is that huh. Going by the distance... it should be that, right? But it's bright red though?" (Makoto) I thought I saw something dim pink at the distance.

After jumping a number of times more in the sky, I saw a bright red light that didn't fit this snow field.

It had the shape of a mountain, and when I got closer, I could see that it was shining like a ruby. A mountain remarkably high was there.

"With this, it feels more appropriate to call it Ruby Volcano though. Hmph?" (Makoto) I don't think it is an unnamed place.

It stands out, and it gives out a feeling that's not normal.

For now, I will land.

The ground at my feet is glittery and red.

If this is ruby, it would be amazing.

The billionaire kind of amazing.

If it's colored glass...no, even that would be amazing.

Yeah, the Lapis Lazuli Volcano(probably), its worth in seeing is plenty.

I should do some harvesting later.

This might be how it feels to go to the south beaches and get an urge of collecting seashells.

I haven't experienced that though.

It is a thinking that is slightly stemming from greed.

"If this is the place, someone should be living here." (Makoto) I change [Sakai] to search and spread it to the whole mountain.

I had to shrink the magic armor slightly, so it can't be helped that some of my magic power leaks out. Because I still cannot fix the consumption to a point that utilizes the magic power to a 100%.

If I was able to do it, it would be able to stay infinitely after all.

It might serve as a goal.

It works for offensive and defensive, so even if this power is exposed, the demerits are low. If I had to put out a problem, it would be that if I have it deployed in visible mode, the people will probably not get close to me.

If I walked with it visible, I don't know how many times I would be told every day: 'You are being haunted'.

Being visible is a pain. I definitely don't want that.

"There it is. There's a cave over there huh. I see." (Makoto) Around halfway up the mountain, there's a cave that can be entered.

Inside it, there's the reaction of less than a hundred life signs.

They are demi-humans, or maybe mamonos.

Okay, let's go.

There doesn't seem to be any trap, and mamonos are not coming out.

Comparing this to what it has been until now, I would say this is actually on the safe side.

The only thing that happened was that I encountered a big Frost Dragon because of my carelessness, and I slapped it away. There wasn't anything that could be called a real fight, and I was able to arrive at the objective practically without obstructions.

But the encounter rate was actually relatively high.

If I dealt with all of them, the amount would be enough to serve as tracks to know exactly what route I took.

Even so, I felt like this place was safe.

The people living here are probably doing their regular patrols and securing safety.

"Oh, heh~" (Makoto)

I arrive at the cave.

Without much hesitation I enter, and the situation changed a bit.

I see.

My voice unconsciously leaked. I stop my feet and look at my surroundings.

"I see, Lapis Lazuli. For the inside to be deep blue..." (Makoto) The

outside is red, and inside is blue.

...Sadly, counting the environment, I wouldn't want to live in this place.

It may be beautiful, but I would limit it to touring.

"Ah, are they coming to receive me?" (Makoto)

After advancing for a while, I perceive a presence heading this way. I stop my feet.

It's one person.

It doesn't seem to be forming any magic, and doesn't seem to be taking any attack stance.

But it is really blue.

I remember hearing that blue light helps you get a quiet sleep, but with this, I might actually doubt its reliability.

It might have been nonsense.

I can't calm down.

"...Please tell me your name."

The one that appeared looks at me and showed slight agitation.

But it spoke out and asked for a self-introduction.

Surprisingly, it was in common language.

"Name is Raidou. I accepted the request of Root, and have brought the egg of the superior dragon Crimson Red...-sama." (Makoto) That was close.

I almost forgot to say -sama.

Even though I had resolved myself to be more careful after the incident with Grount, the person that had come out was a bit mysterious and made me almost slip.

Slime?

Well, that half-solid body that seemed to be made up of a blue jell-like substance, has the shape of a hyuman. It seems that it does have a

ruggedness resembling that of a face, but how to say it...

Ah, it is a woman.

There's a portion that seems to be her breast.

She is not wearing clothes, so I am speaking with a naked person.

And it seems like it is a woman.

To my regret, she is totally transparent and I don't feel any sexual attraction to her.

In an incredibly rude way, I can maintain a gentleman demeanor.

Being sexually attracted to this level of special would take a really special man too.

Even Tomoki might not...no, that guy might actually go for it without any discrimination.

No but...

Wait, what am I even thinking?

Anyways, I am sorry.

And while at it, if Root's information is correct, the past Mio seems to have cornered them to the brink of extinction; I am sorry for that as well.

I won't put it in words, but I will at least apologize.

"Is that Azuma-sama?"

Azuma?

I felt like my palpitation jumped up in an instant.

A really nostalgic name.

But for this slime-kin(temporary) to use that name, I don't think that she is using it while knowing the meaning for me.

I calm down my heart.

Ah, she is looking at the egg.

Could it be...

"...Excuse my rudeness but, is that Crimson Red-sama?"

As I thought, the name of the dragon.

So its name is Azuma.

It gives me a sense of familiarity.

Because it is the same name as a close friend of mine.

Not only is it not Japanese, reacting this much just because of the name is no good.

In the first place, even if the name is Azuma, I heard that the one in this world is male.

I see, so there's 4 superior dragons that are male, and 3 that are female huh.

...No wait, Root was originally a woman, so there are more female?

But right now he is male, right?

It might not be good for my mental health to think about this, but he spoke about having my child or whatever, so he should be able to turn into a woman as well. In that case...

Yeah, let's put a middle.

There's 3 male superior dragons, 3 female, and 1 other.

"Uhm, Raidou-sama?"

"Ah! Yes, this is Crimson Red-sama! Sorry, I was a bit spaced out." (Makoto) "You must be tired. It can't be helped. The journey to this place is rigorous no matter the route taken after all. Later I will bring you to a place where you can rest your body, but first the egg... is that okay?"

I open the bag in a way that the woman can see, and take out the egg.

The moment she saw it, an emotion of awe was visible in the slime-kin.

She can tell even if it's an egg huh.

As expected of the guardian.

"I have certainly confirmed it. Please forgive me for holding suspicions.

Go ahead, I will guide you to the dwelling of the Crimson Red-sama's guardians, Raidou-sama."

I'm glad.

It seems like this time will end without anything weird happening.

Ah, right.

This place that is red on the outside and blue on the inside; I will ask these people if I can take a bit of it.

Also, I should ask what Root has told them.

...I won't dance at the tune of that pervert's words after all.

I don't want to end in a pointless fight like the time with Grount.

At the end, Grount-san seemed to have grown timid after all...

Also...right. I have to make it back in time to the capital.

Being in this place feels like my sense of time will go weird.

It might be carefree of me, but I advance slowly.

Safely finishing the second egg's errand, I felt slight relief while enjoying the scenery of this secluded region.

Chapter 186: The Banquet's Night at the Dark Capital

I was almost brought into the feast of the Slime-kin and end up taking lodging.

It took more time than I thought.

A mysterious scenery also serves as a pitfall in this kind of sense.

A picturesque scenery should be enjoyed when one has the time.

I made it in time for the banquet, but I returned one hour later than planned.

"Then the egg of Crimson Red has been safely entrusted, right? Looks like it was a success."

"No. I refused their feast, so I probably dampened their mood a bit." (Makoto) "If it's only that, I don't think they mind. In the first place, they wouldn't think bad of the person that brought the one they worship just because of something like that."

"...It would be good if that's the case. I don't think I will be associating with them deeply in the future, so there was a part of me that acted slightly halfheartedly thinking that it would most likely be the last time I see of them... you see." (Makoto) "And in truth, having an individual settlement placed at these parts would be harsh even if we were to station the Forest Onis. It would be fine if we have teams formed, but if they are alone, it might be slightly dangerous. In that sense, our relationship with them will most likely not get any deeper."

"We are already lacking in people, so I don't plan on going so far. Even if I bring people to this capital...we would need Shiki or Tomoe to manage them every now and then, right? It would be bad to have the store on leave after all." (Makoto) "But the other side... might request of it."

"At that time, I will politely refuse." (Makoto)

"That would be the best course. By the way, about the seating

precedences of today…”

I return to the demon race capital and change to a dwarf-made ceremonial dress in our room.

At first, they proposed a room for each of us, but it would be a pain when returning to Asora, so we told them that one room would be fine.

Also, the number of places where I can’t wear my jacket has increased, so I relied on the words of a dwarf that told me to leave it to him, and had him create a number of clothes that can be used for parties and for etiquette.

Now that I think of it, I wonder why I didn’t ask the Orcs for that.

Even though I should have known that armor-like effects would be added to the clothes the moment I asked a dwarf to make it.

As a result, it took quite a lot of time before it was finished.

Right now they are at the drawers.

It is kind of a waste.

“Seating precedence? Ah, the seat numbers huh. Uhm…” (Makoto)

I have Shiki show us where we will be sitting.

“We would be here.” (Shiki)

“Ah, hm? That’s quite close to the Demon Lord. This could be taken as being welcomed, right?” (Makoto) Are they appealing again?

I did tell them that I won’t be favoring the demons though.

“The segmentation of the welcoming is quite something. Without a doubt, we are being treated as state guests.” (Shiki) “S-State guests… Mere merchants like us, are on the level of importance to that of a country?” (Makoto) “As long as we don’t delve into it, they will most likely not be saying it themselves, but it seems that way. As expected of the Demon Lord Zef. He must have felt something from Waka-sama.” (Shiki) “Is there going to be an incredible welcoming hell coming?” (Makoto)

My stomach is hurting already.

Even though the Rotsgard academy festival was already too much for me, and yet...

“Considering these seats, it might conversely be different. I think a chat with the Demon Lord will be the priority. Even if we enter, the Demon Generals should have taken their seats already.” (Shiki) ...

I have a sense of discomfort from the words of Shiki.

Leaving aside the Demon Generals, we will be sharing table with the Demon Lord’s children, right?

In that case, I feel like he should be saying more though.

“Shiki, the ones we will be sharing tables with will be the children of the Demon Lord, so they should be the prince-sama and princess-sama, right?” (Makoto) ... Even so, the Demon Generals and the royalty huh.

That will mentally fatigue me plenty.

Please learn that even if you have a refreshing smile, even if you smile gently, it will be pressuring depending on the person.

No, if they are doing it while knowing, I would just have to endure it though.

I can’t just tell them to please stop smiling after all.

“Oya, ah right. Waka-sama didn’t know, right.” (Shiki)

“What?” (Makoto)

“The demon race chooses their next Lord by their power. At the election there might be slight political power involved, but in the end, you won’t be able to become the Demon Lord unless you have the power to support it.” (Shiki) “I see.” (Makoto)

“That next generation Demon Lord is called the the child of the Demon Lord by the demon race.” (Shiki) “...Is that different from being a prince or princess?” (Makoto)

It would create factions between siblings, but I feel like I am only being told that they prioritize strength.

“Sorry, my words were insufficient. In other words, lineage doesn’t matter within promising candidates, and after gathering around a hundred, they give them education to become Lords, and among them, the next Demon Lord will be elected. The kids that are gathered are all ‘Children of the Demon Lord’.” (Shiki) ... Eh?

In other words...

“The ones there weren’t children that came directly from the Demon Lord?” (Makoto) “Most likely. It was already reduced to 4, so the next one will probably decide the future Demon Lord. Of course, the ones that couldn’t become Demon Lord will be given fitting posts and will take the role of leading the demon race together with the Demon Lord.” (Shiki) So the linage doesn’t matter huh.

That’s impressive.

If you are promising, you will separate from your family in a young age and be treated as the child of the Demon Lord and be polished.

With that, promising talents would definitely be raised. They will be raised but...I also feel like questioning if it’s really necessary to go that far.

As long as you have power, as long as you have talent; they disregard the person’s circumstances, is what I felt in those words.

“The demon race really is completely into a power doctrine huh.” (Makoto) “Yeah, if they don’t do that, they might not have been able to survive, but it is certainly extreme.” (Shiki) “Even if it does produce results...it is not a way of thinking that I would like to bring to Asora.” (Makoto) “Other places will be other places; Asora will be Asora, Waka-sama.” (Shiki) “Right.” (Makoto)

I nod at the words of Shiki.

“Waka-sama! The guides have come-desu wa!” (Mio)

“Mio, welcome back. So the guides have come. You arrived barely in time. You took your time coming back.” (Makoto) “I came satisfied. It was all as planned-desu wa.” (Mio)

"... Yes yes. Then, let's go." (Makoto)

I feel like she is the type of person that would say: 'There's still one minute left till closing time!'.

... I was also that type as well.

How nostalgic.

"Yes." (Mio)

Just like Mio -who was barely in time-said, the guides came soon after.

Mio is, without doubt, the person that is enjoying this trip the most.

◇◆◇◆◇◆◇◆

I'm glad it is not a formal stand-up meal.

In terms of feeling, this is more like that of a wedding reception.

Of course, there's no bridegroom or bride though.

At times there would be performance dances, announced shows, and buffet cuisine of incredible size being distributed.

The atmosphere is lively and the food is good.

Mio and Shiki are having fun, and I am also enjoying it plenty myself.

I am grateful for the consideration of the demons for letting us act without the need of being too reserved.

Just that, the gaze of the Demon Lord and the children were frequently directed to our side.

It is obvious for the host to worry about the state of their guests, so while brushing it as something that can't be helped, I also felt slight nervousness because of it.

There were moments when the Demon Lord would bring conversations to me.

The other people that were probably nobles of the demon race or important people of the army; those people didn't throw any such conversation. There's quite the distance from them, but this point

honestly makes me happy.

The guess of Shiki seems to have been spot on.

And also...

“It seems his memories are gone, but how to say it, it seems there’s still the trauma clinging onto him.” (Makoto) “...Looks that way. I am slightly surprised.” (Shiki)

“How rude-desu wa. To foam the moment he sees someone.” (Mio)

“...That just means God-sama is not omnipotent huh, yeah.” (Makoto)

It is something that happened when we arrived at the banquet.

At the table where the Demon Generals were gathered, one of them suddenly stood up. Well, his upper half was that of a hyuman, but its lower half was that of a snake, so I’m not sure if to call it stand up... wait, that’s of no importance.

When I thought that he was staring at Mio while trembling fiercely, without saying anything, he began foaming and fell to his back.

The place turned silent for a moment.

We are the only ones who know the reason why.

He, the Demon General Reft, probably doesn’t know the reason himself. The fear inside his heart must have remained.

I thought it was only a sense of inferiority level of trauma, but it was actually at the level of PTSD.

I thought less of it because there were no memories remaining, but it seems it was still resounding in Reft-san’s heart.

And so, there’s only 3 at the Demon General seats now.

The person that’s wholeheartedly eating is someone I have not seen before, but it must be the last one of the Demon Generals.

The looks are like that of a hyuman.

Must be a demi-human, but the power itself doesn’t seem to be that

much.

Maybe that means there's more who are like Rona?

I don't want that.

"It's okay Mio-dono. Well prepared food is coming out in numbers, so we are being welcomed." (Shiki) "...I am happy about that, you know? But this and that are two different things, right? What part of me looks like a monster that makes people faint-desu ka?" (Mio) It seems Mio is discontent about the reaction of Reft.

If someone just heard the conversation, Mio's anger would be reasonable, but when thinking about what Mio did before, I even feel like using a slipper to hit her head as a tsukkomi.

'In the first place, you are the one that brought him here, weren't you?', is the kind of tsukkomi that would come out.

And so, I have no comments.

"Raidou-dono, what do you think about tonight's banquet? From what this one sees, it seems you are enjoying yourself." (Zef) "Yeah, thanks for the great seats. We are enjoying ourselves plenty." (Makoto) "And your followers, it seems they have something to say though."

"Don't mind it. Its just that she didn't like how Reft-dono reacted, that's all. Uhm, can I ask how he is now?" (Makoto) "Hm, the matter of Reft spoiled her mood huh. This one is truly sorry for that. It seems like right now he is seeing a nightmare of sorts. This one has received reports that he has been moaning in agony, but there's no danger to his life. It is not something to worry about." (Zef) Ah, what should I do.

Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, I was thinking about telling them about Kaleneon while I am here, but there's the issue with Reft, so it was hard to say it.

Why did he have to be there and at that time in specific.

Because of today, it became even more difficult to say it.

"..."

Uh, the Demon Lord seems to be looking at me.

A gentle smile as if he wanted to become my comrade, no, like a smile of someone plotting something.

I want to think that this is unjustified suspicion, but from experience, I can tell that there's something behind that smile.

"A-Ahahaha. I am relieved that it was not anything serious. Yeah." (Makoto) "Right, Raidou-dono. After this, there's still a bit of time before the main dishes come out you see. If Raidou-dono is okay with it...can you accompany me for a bit?" (Zef) "Accompany you to where?" (Makoto)

"Over there, at the balcony. This one has drunk at a slightly fast pace you see, so this one was thinking of breathing in a bit of night breeze." (Zef) Outside.The balcony huh.

Well, if it's only that.

I look at Shiki and he makes a small nod.

It seems it will be fine.

"Understood. I will gladly accompany you. My face is also a bit flushed after all." (Makoto) "Umu. The night view from the castle is beautiful you know. Well even if this one says so, it is practically night all the time in this capital though. Hahahaha!!" (Zef) Being urged by the Demon Lord, I stand up from my seat.

Oh, I am slightly staggering.

The alcoholic drinks of the demon race are quite potent.

Sweet alcohol and bitter alcohol is normally on the high level.

If I get used to the alcohol in this place, I might not be able to drink the whiskey of Rotsgard as an alcoholic drink.

I might feel it tastes like juice.

If I detox myself with magic, this level of intoxication would be gone in an instant, but since I finally got drunk in good fun, that would be a waste.

I try walking a few steps and follow after the Demon Lord that didn't seem that drunk, and leave to the balcony.

There was no one, only the Demon Lord and I.

I could hear the door closing from my back, and the bustle of the banquet felt distant.

The wind that was neither strong nor weak was pleasant.

"How is the night view of the capital?" (Zef)

"Beautiful. It may be faint, but the lights of many colors somehow feel gentle." (Makoto) "Gentle huh. It is an impression that wouldn't be given by a demon. How fresh." (Zef) The Demon Lord laughs amused.

From what I see, he doesn't look that drunk.

It was a laugh that came after words that felt like they had many emotions placed within.

Sobering up might have been a pretext to bring me out.

"...This one would want you to...give me your opinion of the same night view, at the day of your departure." (Zef) "...Okay." (Makoto)

"Tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, Raidou-dono, this one wants you to look at the demon race and understand us. In the good and bad points." (Zef) Does that mean he intends to show me the strong points as well as their weak points?

And at the end, tell him how I felt.

"I think it is splendid. I can feel the wisdom of the demons and their will to live." (Makoto) "To tell you the truth, we weren't trying to deceive you, but this isn't a capital that functions as the metropolis." (Zef) "Eh?" (Makoto)

"Accurately speaking, it has stopped being that way." (Zef)

"Because of the war?" (Makoto)

"That's right. Try thinking about it. The demon race has obtained vast territory, and yet, is there really a need to have a capital in a place as

harsh as this one?" (Zef) ...

That's certainly true.

The current territory that the demon race possesses, the north of Elysion may be pretty vague, so the hyumans don't have a map of it, but at the very least, there's land that's better suited than this.

"Yes, that's true." (Makoto)

"Umu, in truth, right now we have been building up a city at the coastlands that will be functioning as the capital. We are making this the center of the country. This one is also normally there." (Zef) Then why did you have us walk inside the blizzard for several days?

If you had a more comfortable place to be in, shouldn't that be better?

...Is it because it is crazy far?

"'Then why did you call us here?', is what you are thinking, right?" (Zef) "Uh, yes. A bit." (Makoto)

Did it show in my face?

I am trying my best to not show my thoughts in my face though.

"It is because Raidou-dono is not using the correct method to conceal difficult emotions. If you don't want to be seen through, you shouldn't try erasing your emotions, but hide them. If you force yourself to erase them, it will only make it more obvious." (Zef) "I-I see." (Makoto)

"That time I asked you if you had fun as well. It would be okay to just leave a smile on your face. There's no need to force yourself to stay expressionless. Most of all, you should learn how to smile with your eyes. With that, you will be able to hide most things, and even earn others." (Zef) "Thank you very much for the advise." (Makoto)

Why am I suddenly being taught by the Demon Lord here?

But...to smile properly huh.

He says it as if it's easy, but it is actually difficult.

If I was told to do it without caring of the situation, there are times

when I just can't.

I will have to be diligent.

"This is only the basics that can't even be considered basics. There's no need to think that you owe me anything. Ah, the talk was about the capital, right. This capital you see, is a place that has our history piled up. And for a long time, it has been the place that's been the demon race's everything. That's why, this one thought that this is the place that this one wanted to show Raidou-dono no matter what. That's the reason why this one had you walk such a harsh journey." (Zef) "History..." (Makoto)

"That's right, history. The many customs that have been born from this place are living within ourselves." (Zef) "...Like for example, the matter with the children?" (Makoto)

I remember the words of Shiki and try asking.

Even if there's no blood relation, that person will be treated as a Demon Lord candidate as long as that person is promising.

"...Who did you hear that from? That's right. That method of choosing Lords was also born from this place, is what I have been told. It seems I have subordinates with loose lips. How troublesome." (Zef) "No, it was one of my followers that coincidentally knew of it." (Makoto) Even if there's one, I have not heard of such thing from Shiki or Mio.

I should cover for the general subordinates of his.

"Hoh~ such extensive knowledge that person has. I see, a subordinate of yours that knows of the customs of the demon race. Well, that's surprising." (Zef) He doesn't look surprised at all.

Maybe he already knows about Shiki.

The time when he was a Lich known by the name Larva, he was acquainted with Rona in some way, so the chances of her reporting about it is high.

"It was by coincidence." (Makoto)

“Even if so. The number of customs this one was planning on showing you tomorrow, you might know them already. The amount of demons that know the hyuman society are low. The majority that know of it are from the army. In that sense, you people who are a merchants, are deepening your knowledge. That’s something worthy of respect. You truly have good subordinates.” (Zef) “I am honored.” (Makoto)

“...Within this everlasting darkness, the demon race has endured hardship. But that will continue forever with no end to it. At this rate, the demon race will perish. The moment we understood this, we gathered our strength and waited for the opportunity. And then, this one began war. As a Lord, this one doesn’t regret it.” (Zef) After a slight silence from my words of being honored, the Demon Lord that was looking at the distance, and without looking at me, he said words that were definitely directed at me.

That’s how I felt.

“Even if it was the property of others, the demon race needed a rich land. If we didn’t do that, we would have suffered in eternity, starve, and die. Raidou-dono, if you were to became the Lord of such a race, what would you have done? This may be hypothetical talk, but please let me hear it.” (Zef) With a face that didn’t show it was just mere hypothetical talk, the Demon Lord looks at me.

I think that this capital... really is a land that has big meaning to the demon race.

The Demon Lord probably recollected something and has asked me this.

Is it like the Kyoto and Tokyo for the Japanese?

The capital of history in essence.

No, it has only been a few years since the capital changed. It can’t be compared to this.

It might look that way to me, but it is probably not that way.

“If it were me you say. If it were me, I would look for new frontiers before placing my hands on the belongings of someone else.” (Makoto)

“Look for land that’s not yet seen huh. Then, in the case that it shows despairing results?” (Zef) Eh...

I went through the trouble of answering. Is it valid to return the question?

“Why would it be despairing?” (Makoto)

“Geographically speaking. There’s only inferior places left. There’s places that can’t be overcome because of the lack of craft.” (Zef) “Then I will have us research in the crafts and advance it.” (Makoto) “I see. Raidou-dono is saying that war should be avoided huh.” (Zef)

“War will definitely leave grudge. Thinking about the future, I don’t think this will turn into a plus.” (Makoto) “That’s of course true. But the demon race was way too cornered. The moment we judged that it was impossible to pioneer further north, we destroyed the demi-humans that were the previous residents of this place and obtained this land.” (Zef) ...

The place that you decided to steal...was this?!

Just what kind of wretched place were the demons living in before?

The Goddess as well, she is as evil as always.

I really continue to think that I should give her a good punch at that face of hers.

“I-I see.” (Makoto)

“Ah, and not leaving any grudge behind.” (Zef)

“Eh, but...” (Makoto)

“Slaughtered them all. If we take care of everyone, there will be no grudges left. It may be an inane plan, but at that time, that’s how we saved our race.” (Zef) That’s certainly true. If they don’t leave a single enemy behind, there won’t be grudges left.

They really are through.

“...”

“The answer may be different depending on the person, but the

foundation of the demon race is without doubt ruled by the principle of strength. If this one has to say it without any ornate words, it would be: survival of the fittest. If possible, this one doesn't want to show you that part of us, but if we are to continue our relationship, the sooner the better. That's how this one thought. In the time you are here, you will witness the customs that are created by this principle, and its complications." (Zef) So he is telling me that they will face us seriously.

It is certainly true that showing one's dirty side is hard to do.

...It is scary to do.

"But it was slightly unexpected. From what this one has felt, Raidou-dono is someone that has quite the power. Hyumans are not a race that originally possess such high power. In other words, Raidou-dono has faced that much difficulties in life. And those kind of people, the people that have power will wish for more power and authority, that's how they end up thinking. Honestly speaking, this one didn't expect you to avoid war to that extent." (Zef) "Thinking of avoiding war, is that so weird?" (Makoto)

"For you merchants, it is also a chance to support your Lords. Of course, it is also a chance to gain huge profits, you know?" (Zef) "I...don't think of gaining huge profits from the war." (Makoto)

"...But when you were having a conversation with this one and the children, you said something that was akin to saying: 'I will be gaining profits from the war, but you can't complain about it', though?" (Zef) I didn't say anything that meant that.

Where did he pick it up in that way?

Ah, that huh.

The talk that even if I oppose them, it will not be because I am trying to be their enemies but because of interest, or something like that?

But that was not intended in that way.

"No, that's a misunderstanding. I am not thinking of participating in the war itself after all." (Makoto) "Rona was suffering a headache from that.

Saying this is not what he said last time, that Raidou-dono might be intending to turn war into a business." (Zef) "Like I am saying..." (Makoto)

"It's fine. It's enough to hear those words of yours. Just like what Raidou-dono says, that's Rona's misunderstanding.

"We still have the time to understand each other. This one thinks that it is fine to slowly know of each other as we advance. Without hurrying." (Zef) "Thank you very much" (Makoto)

Stopping my words with his hand, the Demon Lord understood what I tried to say.

I'm glad.

It is truly a misunderstanding after all.

I am glad it didn't end up in us being at cross purposes.

...

Right, if it's now...

There's no people around, only the Demon Lord and I.

On their side there's only the Demon Lord; in my side it would be best to have Shiki and Mio by my side, but thinking about it, the other party is a Lord-sama. In reality, a situation that fits such criteria would be hard.

He seems to be an understandable person, and from that conversation just now, it seems he has his own thoughts about the demon race stealing land.

(Shiki, do you have time?) (Makoto)

I call Shiki with thought transmission.

(Waka-sama? It looks like you are speaking with the Demon Lord but, is there some sort of problem?) (Shiki) (No, its not that. You see, right now the atmosphere makes it possible to talk about Kaleneon. Is it okay to tell him?) (Makoto) (...Right. The chances of us speaking with the Demon Lord will most likely not be that many in the future. If it's at this time, it

would not turn in a debt. Just that, when you explain the situation, I think that it would be faster if you don't mention the Ansland sisters being the reason, or about Asora's matters.) (Shiki) (But then the only reason left would be my parents. Wouldn't that be bad? Isn't it better to touch about the subject of Eva and Ruria's circumstances...) (Makoto) (If you speak about that, it could be taken as siding with the hyumans and reclaiming Kaleneon. Taking the side of the hyumans also means opposing the demon race. In terms of result, that action helps the heroes in a sense, so it is better for 'us all' to not increase our image of being the ally of hyumans.) (Shiki) (I-I see) (Makoto)

Now that I think about it, he does have a point.

It is only in terms of result, but our actions help the hyumans more than the demons.

I had no underlying intentions of doing that though.

Looking only at the results, if I tell them that I have reclaimed Kaleneon because hyumans asked me to...would be bad.

Yeah, it would be bad.

(In that case, it would be better to just tell them that it was the homeland of Waka-sama's parents, and that's why you took it back, which would let us earn more that way. For the demon race, it would be like giving them information that Waka-sama's parents were from Kaleneon. Who knows in what way they will take that information. For our side, it is not information that would trouble us.) (Shiki) (Understood. Then I will be doing that.) (Makoto)

(Don't mind it. Also, the Demon Generals and the other people are beginning to worry about your situation there. When you see the chance, wrap things up and return. Ah right, I almost forgot. There's also the matter of Reft. At the very least, tell him that Waka-sama didn't participate in the attack. Right...tell him that Waka-sama's subordinates went on a rampage for your sake, or something like that please. Mio-dono and I will deal with it if anything happens later.) (Shiki) (Thanks. Then after telling him this, I will be returning.) (Makoto)

I cut off the thought transmission.

The Demon Lord has not detected the thought transmission.

I have hidden it perfectly...I think.

The Demon Lord is looking at the night view with his hands on the railing.

"...Fuh~ No good. This one might have spoken a bit too much. Having our guest feeling the night breeze all this time, is something that should not be done. Should we go back, Raidou-dono? I thank you for accompanying me." (Zef) "Uhm, Demon Lord-sama. There's something I have to tell you. Can I have a bit of your time?" (Makoto) "This one invited you here. If there's something Raidou-dono has to say, this one will definitely listen." (Zef) "The demon race lost a territory recently, right?" (Makoto)

"...! Yeah. Close to the meeting point with Raidou-dono and the others, there was a country named Kaleneon in the past. That one." (Zef) The expression of the Demon Lord showed the most surprise he has shown till now.

Okay, let's say it.

"That's something we did." (Makoto)

"!!! Raidou-dono, do you understand what you are saying by that?" (Zef) Narrowing his eyes, the Demon Lord takes off all that amiable atmosphere and asks for confirmation.

It is alright. Everything that has to be spoken has already been arranged in my head.

Don't be intimidated.

If it's about Kaleneon, I definitely hold responsibility for it.

I won't run away from it.

"Yes. Us -Kuzunoha Company-took Kaleneon from the hands of the demon race." (Makoto) "...Let's hear the reason. There's obviously one, right? This one hopes that you won't say this was for the sake of

hyumans." (Zef) "It was for my sake." (Makoto)

"Raidou-dono's sake?" (Zef)

"Yes. Kaleneon is...the homeland of my parents. In the past, my parents tied their bond there. For me, Kaleneon is like my second homeland." (Makoto) "..."

"Well even if I say that, I wasn't thinking about recovering the land of Kaleneon which was already right in the middle of demon race territory. Just that..." (Makoto) "Just that?" (Zef)

"My subordinates, thinking of me, took back the aforementioned land. The Kaleneon that they had given to me, I received it." (Makoto) "Is that something your two subordinates, Mio and Shiki, did? Or were there other factors involved?" (Zef) Sharp eyes that tried to see through me.

There was no hostility.

But that was actually fearsome.

He is hiding his emotions just like he told me before.

With an emotionless face that reveals no emotion, he simply cross-examines me.

"I can't say. No matter who was involved, the Kuzunoha Company moved, and I received the fruits of it. Since I received it, I hold the responsibility. I used power...to take away Kaleneon." (Makoto) "... Kukuku. By the principle of power huh. It is certainly true that it is the principle of the demon race but...seriously, it is not a subject that should be said in this place, without doubt. There was a Demon General at that place and it was in the territory of the demon race, right in the middle of it. No matter how much power that can't be overlooked you possess, is it something that can be recaptured by a company independently? Sorry but, this one is in chaos right now. But first, this one wants to ask you one thing. Why did you spare Reft?" (Zef) "I later learned that that person was a Demon General. He was injured, so I had him treated and returned him to the demon race territory. I don't know the reason why his memories are a jumble though." (Makoto) "Because he is a Demon

General huh. If this one had to choose between Kaleneon and Reft, this one would choose Reft. In that sense, should this one be grateful?" (Zef) "No, that is..." (Makoto)

After leaking a chuckle, the Demon Lord makes a mysterious farsighted expression and a faint smile surfaced.

"But you got me. This one probably won't be able to sleep tonight. Even though this one had drunk quite a bit and was in a good mood." (Zef) "..."

"If the talk is over...this time for sure let's return, Raidou-dono." (Zef) "Demon Lord-sama, this talk..." (Makoto)

"If you are going to say: 'Don't tell anyone', that's an impossible deal. This one doesn't know if this one will be able to swallow all this. Also, this isn't a talk that an individual can keep to himself. Well in the first place, it is strange to refer a Lord as an 'individual' though." (Zef) He said it before me.

As I thought, it is impossible to ask him to keep it to himself huh.

But it would look bad to stay silent here so...

"No, this is something that I willingly spoke out because I understood the personality of Demon Lord-sama. That's what I wanted to tell you." (Makoto) "This one will take your evaluation to heart. Now then, let's go back." (Zef) "Thanks." (Makoto)

The Demon Lord opens the door, and we return to the banquet.

A warm atmosphere envelops my body, and when I returned to my seat, I was welcomed by a huge amount of food.

Shiki who knew of the situation, had a face as if saying 'good work'; Mio gave me her impressions of the food and gave me recommendations with a wide smile.

I-I was somehow able to say it.

Today there's only eat and sleep left, so that's a small blessing.

If tomorrow on is like this, my body might not be able to take it.

◇◆◇◆Makoto's Dream◇◆◇◆

A dream.

I could tell from the atmosphere.

After being entertained by the banquet of the demon race, we returned to our room. Then, we locked the room and went to sleep in Asora.

Today I didn't feel like doing anything more.

The moment I returned to my own room, I quickly went down.

Last time it was my old self that seemed to have created a desert. And before that one...it was a dream where I almost killed Hibiki.

Hm, this is bad.

It feels like things are getting messed up.

Dreams like a strange kingdom and desert.

I remember a bit about the people that appeared in it, but the other details are getting foggy.

Dreams are not something that can be easily remembered so it can't be helped, but these chain of events feel like they are trying to tell me something and it bothers me.

This is already the third time after all.

When I wake up, I will ask Tomoe to archive them.

Anyways...the mist is quite thick.

To the level that it looks like smoke.

Where am I...I mean, the me in this dream.

When I thought of this...I found him.

"..."

It isn't as old as last time.

Just that, it looks like I have an incredibly troubled expression.

I don't know if I have had these much emotion shown in my face before.

I was sitting at a bench.

Aside from that, I can't see anything else.

It's kinda ironic to say this in a dream but, this place doesn't feel real.

Also, it bothers me that there's no other person here aside from me.

"How long has it been since we have talked just the two of us, Waka."

"...Tomoe." (Makothree)

Eh?

I was surprised by the voice.

Before I noticed, the shadow of a person appeared at the bench that I was sitting on.

Ah, so this strange place was prepared by Tomoe.

Or more like, there haven't been any of my followers or the people of Asora in these dreams before.

"That kind of expression is...no, this isn't something that I should be saying." (Tomoe) "You are the reason after all." (Makothree)

"Yeah." (Tomoe)

"Tomoe, I..." (Makothree)

He is using 'ore'.

If I remember correctly, there was one dream where I used 'ore' as well.

Yeah, even though it is me -no-maybe it's because it is me huh.

The sense of disparity is incredible.

"Waka, please don't say further." (Tomoe)

"I haven't said anything yet." (Makothree)

"You were mostly going to apologize, right? It is unnecessary." (Tomoe) "...Even through the end, there's no rivalling you huh." (Makothree)

...

The end?

“It is something I wished for. At the very least, I have no regrets. Please.” (Tomoe) “...”

“Being unable to reincarnate is something I was already prepared for when I made a pact with Waka. Also, there’s Mio at that side as well. She may not be as fun as being with Waka, but being together with her doesn’t bore me.” (Tomoe) “If I had...If I had been stronger, do you think this wouldn’t have happened?” (Makothree) “...No. Even if Waka had obtained the power to overwhelm that Goddess, there’s no knowing if the result would have changed. No one would know.” (Tomoe) “But at the very least, I wouldn’t have done something as unsightly as exchanging the two heroes and Mio, right?” (Makothree) What’s this?

Mio was here too.

And she is not here anymore. Is that what he is trying to say?

“But the Goddess might have come out faster. If that happened, not only Mio, Waka might have died at that moment as well.” (Tomoe) “Even so!!” (Makothree)

“Everything has already happened. Waka, you have chosen your own path. We obeyed it. And so, we fought with a God and are now here. I said this before but, I...no, Mio as well, didn’t regret anything. Something like: ‘If we hadn’t met Waka’, has not crossed my mind one bit, you know.” (Tomoe) “...”

“It was truly fun. A lot more fun than living eternally in a life without path.That’s why Waka should also look forward, and walk your own path. All your worries, I will be taking them here. When you cross the river of styx, I will return them to you.” (Tomoe) “My path huh.” (Makothree)

“Yes. It is not like I can see through everything, so I don’t have the right to say this all high-and-mighty though.” (Tomoe) “Even when you are speaking to me in this fashion?” (Makothree)

In this fashion...

What is it?

For some reason, a strange and bad feeling is clinging onto me.

“...Yeah. If you want to hear, I will tell you but... just promise me, you will not drag us along anymore.” (Tomoe) <She is telling him to stop burdening himself with their memories.> “You are so unfair, Tomoe. You who had no other worries aside from period dramas and Japanese customs, is having worries? Are you telling me this knowing that I want to hear it? Understood, I will walk forward. It is only a bit more after all. I will look at the other side when I finish climbing.” (Makothree) The mouth of the hung down head had a smile surface.

The corners of the mouth were upwards, but it looked like a made-up smile.

I could somehow tell that he wasn’t truly smiling.

“Then...since the time Waka had decided on his path, I steadily began to think this way. That maybe...If maybe there was another person aside from me and Mio who supports Waka...” (Tomoe) “Are you referring to a follower? But I don’t have any other follower aside from you and Mio.” (Makothree) “Mio and I might have been a bit too possessive. We did receive equal affection, but we were negative about having a new follower.” (Tomoe) “...I can’t imagine having a follower aside from you two. If I had to force myself to put out a candidate, maybe Zef. Another one could be Sand Wave? Root? Well, the candidates would be them.” (Makothree) “Zef huh. He might be a good one. Umu, if it were a man, we might not have minded much.” (Tomoe) “A third follower huh. That’s quite the talk there.” (Makothree)

No, and Shiki?

Shiki... is not here?

“I don’t mind if it’s 3 or 4, but well, I had such a weak-willed thinking.” (Tomoe) “Even you think about ‘maybe’s’ huh. I am slightly relieved to hear that.” (Makothree) “Well then, it is already time to say goodbye. I made this kind of setup just in case, but I am glad that even someone like me was able to serve as a regret reliever.” (Tomoe) “Tomoe...” (Makothree)

Oh, oh...

Tomoe and I kissed.

And it doesn't feel like this is the first time.

We are used to it.

I can't believe it.

From all this, this is the most surprising.

With Tomoe huh.

I do think of her as someone dependable, but she is more of a brother, and I... don't see her as a woman.

No well, she is indeed a beautiful woman though.

"...Please forgive this blunder of mine. My body has been blown away without remains, so I unconsciously did something like this." (Tomoe)
Her body without remains...

As I thought, this Tomoe is...

There was the shock of that kiss, but I could tell that something even colder and heavier than that was being lodged in my stomach.

It hurts.

Tomoe was smiling all the time, and as if slipping into the thick mist, she dispersed like sand to the wind.

She disappeared.

Don't joke around.

Tomoe and Mio as well!

As if they would be killed by the Goddess!!

Hey, what in the hell did you do?!

Just what kind of stupid path did you take to lose them both?!

And Shiki?! What happened to Shiki?!

Damn it. I don't understand the situation, so the emotions that have nowhere to go create more and more questions.

The surroundings of the me who was alone now, showed an instant change.

The mist that had grown thin was whirling, and disappeared with me at the centre of it.

Eh, this place is...

“Head, I am entering.”

A room I remember, and a familiar voice.

Without waiting for my reply, the owner of the voice enters the room.

As I thought.

When I saw his figure, I immediately thought this; Demon Lord Zef.

“Zef-san.” (Makothree)

“The matter of Tomoe-dono... is regrettable. But even so, I have come here to have a word with you.” (Zef) “It is alright now. I had Tomoe sermon me just a moment ago.” (Makothree) With a loose face, I smile at the Demon Lord.

It feels like I am quite close with Zef-san.

“...By Tomoe-dono?” (Zef)

“Yeah. Seriously, she is a worrywart. She comes to sermon me even after death.” (Makothree) “...”

“And, how are the preparations?” (Makothree)

“Completely done. We are waiting for you, Head.” (Zef)

“I see. Zef-san might have forgiven me, but at this rate, I feel like Rona and Sari will get noisy.” (Makothree) “With Head’s position, it can’t be helped. There’s no choice but to accept it.” (Zef) I see.

The dream’s me has sided with the demon race.

So this is that kind of dream huh.

“Thinking of it like somebody else’s business.” (Makothree)

“It is in truth somebody else’s business after all. You have finally taken

off what was burdening you, so I will have you take a break." (Zef) The Demon Lord looks a lot younger than what my impression of him was.

No, his outward appearance hasn't changed much, but his atmosphere is kinda different.

"Well, I understand how you feel, but taking a break will have to come after finishing one job more." (Makothree) "Fuh, I am aware. Now then, when you leave the room, I will have you change gears, Head. First, we have to encourage the soldiers." (Zef) The Demon Lord opens the door of the room and waits for me.

As if complying to his words, I walk there and leave to the corridor with the Demon Lord.

Looking at the ceiling, I take a deep breath and exhaled.

"Let's go, Zef. As a Demon General, I will have you work plenty." (Makothree) "As you wish. As the new Demon Lord, I will serve you with this life of mine." (Zef) "The enemy is the Goddess. Do you have the resolve?" (Makothree)

"For a long time. Since the moment I was born a demon." (Zef)

Demon Lord.

I climbed through the steps of the demon race and became a Demon Lord huh.

Not only that, it seems like it is before stepping against the Goddess.

This me is a lot further than me.

But...by sacrificing Tomoe and Mio.

I clench my teeth.

Looking at the figure and expression of the me who has walked further beyond, I could tell that I was feeling anger.

At that moment, the world creaks.

The scenery of the two walking the corridor had fine cracks appearing.

A displeasing sound as if glass was scraping each other resounded

heavily.

I woke up from my dream.

◇◆◇◆◇◆◇◆

It wasn't as if I woke up because I was having a nightmare, or because I was driven out of my dream.

I silently open my eyes.

As usual, it is late at night.

Like the saying goes, the time when plants also sleep.

Don't joke around.

That's not a precognitive dream.

Because they are walking a path that is clearly different from the real me.

But 'if I cooperate with the demon race, it will lead to that result'; there's the chance of something close to that happening.

I have been thinking that the dreams I have had were not just simple dreams.

Tomoe. I should ask Tomoe to record my dreams.

'The memories don't fade, the people just forget about it', is what she said.

In that case, I can reproduce everything including the previous dreams, and check them out.

...It really is no joke.

I don't want to become the Demon Lord, and I don't want to lose Tomoe and Mio.

In the first place, counting the two previous dreams that are starting to become foggy, there's too much bad aftertaste!

I send a thought transmission to Tomoe.

Even if she is sleeping, I intended to wake her up.

(Waka? Weren't you sleeping?) (Tomoe)

(You were awake huh. I have something I wanted to consult you about. Is it okay to do it right now?) (Makoto) I thought that she was definitely sleeping.

What was she doing this late in the night?

(Understood. Then I will head to your room.) (Tomoe)

(No, I will go to you. Are you in your room?) (Makoto)

It is not like I am lonely, but for some reason, I wanted to see Tomoe.

(No, I'm outside. At the forest on the right of the mansion.) (Tomoe) (Understood.) (Makoto)

Hearing the location of Tomoe, I head there.

The forest huh.

I also go there sometimes to shoot my bow, but I don't normally see Tomoe there.

There's not much distance, so I arrive soon.

"Tomoe, what are you doing?" (Makoto)

"Of course, training. Even if I say this, it is more like solving a puzzle." (Tomoe) "Solving a puzzle huh." (Makoto)

Tomoe was at the front of one tree.

With her hands at the katana's handle, she had her body slightly low.

I can tell that it is the stance to pull out the katana.

But the distance between her and the tree is too short.

The pommel is hitting the trunk.

With that, you wouldn't be able to draw in the first place.

Is that a new type of meditation?

"Drawing from this stance seems to serve as training." (Tomoe)

"Drawing you say. Isn't that practically zero-distance? Even if you force

draw it, won't the handle just hit the tree?" (Makoto) "Yes. Several trees have already fallen. That's probably not the correct way." (Tomoe) Of course it is not.

A person wouldn't normally drop a tree for trying to forcefully draw a sword.

Just what kind of handle is that.

"Who did you hear that from?" (Makoto)

"I was taught by Hibiki. It seems to be a foundation of the katana." (Tomoe) "Then won't we get it after looking at her memories?" (Makoto)

"Waka, if I do that, I feel like it would go against the point of training." (Tomoe) "You are serious in the weirdest of places. I like that though." (Makoto) "Just training with the katana is fun, so it doesn't faze me. Even if today is no good, even if tomorrow is no good, even if the day after tomorrow is no good; I will do my best every day. Well even if I say this, I intended to finish the training for today, but since I received a thought transmission from Waka, I continued for a bit more. And, what was the business you had?" (Tomoe) Wiping her sweat, Tomoe laughs with a satisfied expression.

Uh, it reminds me of the smile of the dream Tomoe.

Stop it.

That was...a dream.

Not reality.

That's right, I won't let it become reality.

That's why I came to meet Tomoe.

"I wanted to check a dream of mine for a bit you see. Dreams also enter in the category of memories right? Can you check them?" (Makoto) "Of course. Is it recent?" (Tomoe)

"Yeah, around ten days ago. I think there's a day when I was resting at Asora. I am counting on you for that." (Makoto) "Well then,excuse me while I give it a look." (Tomoe)

“Don’t look at anything unnecessary, okay?” (Makoto)

“I know.” (Tomoe)

Tomoe’s hand touches my forehead.

Fuh~

Anyways, it might have been something important.

With this, I have one thing less to worry about.

Tomoe closes her eyes and searches my memories.

But to place the handle at the tree and draw huh.

Kuma-sensei who taught me the basics of Iai, no wait, I haven’t been taught by sensei, not even once.

... Maybe I just didn’t advance to that stage yet.

Is it because I wasn’t following the lessons well?

Tomoe said she heard it from Hibiki-senpai, but now that I think about it, there’s no training in kendo for drawing, right?

Was senpai learning swordsmanship as well?

In that case, she is more fearsome than I thought.

“...Waka.” (Tomoe)

“Ah, did you finish?” (Makoto)

In the time that I was thinking, it seems she had finished.

Okay, this is no time to be sleeping, so I will look at them right now.

“For around 3 days, there were nights when you didn’t have a dream but... there wasn’t any specially strange dream.” (Tomoe) “Eh?” (Makoto)

“Maybe in those 3 days you had a such a deep sleep that you didn’t have any dreams?” (Tomoe) “No, there’s no way. Ehm, at the day I met Hibiki-senpai... also, at the day when I went to the Empire. Also today, just a moment ago.” (Makoto) “I didn’t find any. What kind of dreams?” (Tomoe)

“In one I was about to kill senpai, at another I made a desert, then I also became a Demon Lord… uhm, Tomoe and the others were dead.” (Makoto) “…It certainly does sound like a suggestive dream.” (Tomoe)

“Are there really none? Memories of me seeing those dreams.” (Makoto) “Yes. Totally.” (Tomoe)

No way.

I certainly did see it and I am able to tell its contents right now.

I saw them, and yet, a dream I didn’t see? I feel more and more that those dreams are not mere dreams.

But Tomoe doesn’t seem to be lying.

What’s going on?

“…Understood. Sorry Tomoe. To ask you for something so late at night.” (Makoto) “No, don’t worry about it. Waka, if it’s okay with you, I can try searching as many times as you want.” (Tomoe) “No, it is not like pushing will do anything. I will return to my room and note down as much information I remember. I might ask of you again but, at that time, I am counting on you.” (Makoto) “I am sorry for not being of help. Just that, Waka…” (Tomoe)

“Hm?” (Makoto)

“We won’t easily die. We are Waka’s followers after all. I want you to believe in that.” (Tomoe) “…Yeah, thanks. Good night.” (Makoto)

“Yeah, have a good sleep. I as well…!! If pushing doesn’t work, maybe pulling…” (Tomoe) “Hm, Tomoe?” (Makoto)

“M-Maybe!! It was that?! Umu, it might be!!” (Tomoe)

“…Tomoe? Hey~” (Makoto)

“Waka!!” (Tomoe)

“What? You won’t sleep?” (Makoto)

“I won’t! As expected, Waka is really different!! Umu, there’s worth in trying! Sorry Waka, I was thinking about going back with you, but I will

be training for a bit more!!" (Tomoe) "Ah...okay. Then, I will be going first." (Makoto)

"Rest well!!" (Tomoe)

...

Well, it didn't seem like a bad agitation so...let's leave it.

I also have things to do here. Need to write down the contents of the dream.

The first two are kinda hard to say, but the one just now is still fine...I think.

Okay, let's return to my room.

Illustrations

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